

THE
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THE COUNTRY.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FOLLOWER.

MR. BRYAN MANSFIELD is staying at the Place from Saturday to Monday; he has stayed at the Place nearly every Saturday to Monday since we came here; and I regret to find that it is a custom which has sprung up since our advent. Indeed, by eloquent looks, by broad innuendoes, and, when he can get the chance, by plain word of mouth, he intimates the attraction which draws him to Riverdale as the needle to the pole.

That this annoys me I need scarcely say. If I were a free agent I could dispose of Mr. Mansfield and his unwelcome attentions in five minutes; but my hands are so tied here, I have already got the character of being so airified (as I overheard Miss Fenton express it the other day) that I shrink from displeasing Sir Joseph; and to drive Mr. Mansfield from his house would displease him, I know, for their business relations are as intimate as their social ones.

So I bend my wits to baffling my unwelcome adorer. Never once has he caught me alone; and though he may sigh and throw out amorous hints and even whisper his admiration in public, yet in a mixed society, and with the guerilla aid of Eva Fenton, who is guarding him for her own hand and never lets him out of sight, I have hitherto been able to hold my own.

Miss Fenton always comes to lunch on Sunday. Far be it from me to imply that she *only* comes to lunch on Sunday; her attendances at that meal are almost daily, but there is more or less

of an invitation given on week-days, and accepted with coy hesitation—'dear Lady Yarborough, you are so kind, but you really will get tired of me if I come every day like this. No? Well then, I *should* like to stay to-day, there is no one at home but mother, and the house is so dull'—whereas on Sunday her appearance is as regular and orthodox as the huge joint of hot roast beef by which Jacquetta indicates her reverence for the Sabbath day.

That time-honoured dish is now smoking under our noses, and we are discussing the morning service with the temperate praise usually bestowed by the British worshipper on his parish church.

'How the Vicar did mumble, to be sure!' says Jacquetta. 'I do wish he would get some new teeth put in.'

'Do you think it would be worth while?' dissents Miss Fenton. 'His sermons are so very dull, that I would rather have a decent excuse for not listening.'

'I quite agree with you,' strikes in Frances; 'it is so soothing to my conscience to find that I really cannot understand what he is saying, that not for worlds would I have that peaceful rumble articulated.'

'Naughty, naughty little Frances! And what was she thinking of during the sermon?' inquires Sir Joseph with ponderous jocosity.

'And the choir!' continues Eva. 'Did you hear them trying to sing one "Te Deum" while the organ was playing another?'

'I wasn't attending just then,' says Jacquetta. 'To tell you the truth,' looking around carefully to make sure that the last servant has left the room, 'I am afraid the service this morning went in at one ear and out at the other. I have been so worried about the servants' pew.'

'Ha! what is that about the servants?' interposes Sir Joseph—interposes is scarcely the right word though to apply to a remark of the worthy knight's, seeing that anything he chooses to say is always received with a reverential pause in the conversation. 'I thought, Jacquetta, that you had arranged with the churchwardens that they were to move into General Lisle's old pew.'

'And so I had,' returns his spouse, 'and was just going to tell them so, when that tiresome old Mrs. Lisle said the other day at luncheon before Paton that she liked her new seat very much, and was glad she had left the old one, as there was a piping draught there from the window above. Paton heard her; I saw him turn

round from the sideboard when she said it, and of course after that I could not think of offering it to the servants.'

'Certainly not,' ejaculates Sir Joseph, drawing himself up in insulted majesty. 'I flatter myself that we deserve better from the parish than that our servants should be poked into any hole or corner.'

'Well, I wouldn't call it a hole or corner,' remarks the literal Jacquetta; 'and after all General and Mrs. Lisle have sat there for the last seven years. But Paton is very particular about his little comforts.'

Jacquetta's black-and-tan Dachs is making a surreptitious meal at my side; he, like his mistress, is inclined to rotundity of figure, and, unlike her, he is strictly dieted for it.

'You are fond of dogs?' asks Mr. Mansfield, as I throw down one of the biscuits adored of Dachs' heart.

'I love them,' I answer, 'and especially when they are as clever as Dachs. Just look how knowing he is! He is wagging his tail so quietly and eating his biscuits so cautiously for fear of attracting Jacquetta's attention. He quite understands that biscuits are forbidden.'

Mr. Mansfield sighs heavily and fixes his black eyes lugubriously on me. Whether he is naturally afflicted with low spirits, or whether love has a depressing effect upon him I know not; but he is mournful in the extreme.

'I wish you would let me give you a Dachs of your own,' he says slowly. 'I would get you the very best that money could buy.'

'No, thank you,' I retort ungraciously, 'I don't want a Dachs.' Then, catching sight of a frown on Sir Joseph's face, and, perceiving instinctively that he is listening, I murmur confusedly if more politely, 'It is very kind of you to think of such a thing, but really I don't want a dog; you see I haven't a place to keep one.'

'My dear Esmé,' says Sir Joseph with an angry snort, 'are you aware that your words imply considerable disrespect of my house and grounds? Are they indeed so limited, so restricted that room cannot be found to accommodate the small, though valuable, Dachshund, Mr. Mansfield is so kindly offering you?'

'Oh come,' interrupts Mr. Mansfield good-naturedly, 'Miss Nugent never meant anything so absurd as that. Well, then that's settled; and I will look out for a Dachs at once. Do you like them black and tan, or fallow?'

Something in the look of his triumphant eye inspires me with

the determination to be more careful than ever that he does not catch me alone this afternoon.

I dare not seek safety in flight, or the solitude of my own room, and cast around me therefore for a sure companion. It is no use appealing to Frances; she would be a determined and conspiring Will o' the Wisp. Jacquetta also is a broken reed, for her occupations even on Sunday afternoon are so multiplied and various that somewhere or other I should infallibly be left in the lurch—over the almshouse tea, if not in the Infants' Sunday School.

No, my refuge is clearly at Eva Fenton's side; 'where *that* bee sucks, there suck I,' and no fear of her desertion need disturb my mind.

She looks a little astonished when I propose a stroll along the chestnut walk, which, bending and twirling in artful curves, stretches out to a mile the circuit of the grounds; but assents nevertheless with a side-glance at Mr. Mansfield, who is unsuspectingly smoking his cigarette on the verandah with Sir Joseph.

When Miss Fenton is ready to start I put my arm through hers with unwonted familiarity and endeavour to beguile her quietly out of the side door without attracting anyone's attention. In vain, however, for with a loud cough and a whisk and a noisy stampede, she makes for the little cloak-room adjoining the verandah, and exclaims vociferously, 'You have forgotten your walking-stick, Miss Nugent; you will never get round the mile walk without it.'

Whereupon Mr. Mansfield turns and surveys us leisurely over his shoulder; but I set off with unruffled tranquillity, secure in my shield and buckler. As a shield and buckler under the circumstances Miss Eva is unequalled; as a companion she leaves much to be desired.

'Well, and are you getting more accustomed to your diggings?' she begins conversationally as we thread our way around the rosebeds. 'Sir Joseph takes one's breath away at first with his pomposity, doesn't he?'

'He is very kind though,' I return, disgusted to hear her speak of her 'dear Sir Joseph' so disrespectfully; one would have thought very shame would have tied her tongue.

'You think so, do you? Well, that's where you make a mistake then. He is never kind to anyone unless he sees his way to getting back as much as he gives.'

'My dear Miss Fenton,' I remonstrate, 'see how kind he is to my sister and me, and what can we give him in return?'

'A very great deal,' says Miss Eva decidedly. 'Position, first of all. He has bragged unceasingly ever since he was married about the Nugent family; and everyone knew perfectly well they never took the least notice of him. Now you are a living proof of his grand connections. Then it pays him to have pretty girls about the house and to swagger about his goodness to them. For instance, you see for yourself,' with a cunning look at me, 'how anxious he is to catch Mr. Mansfield. I don't understand business at all, but I know they are mixed up together somehow in the City.'

'At any rate Sir Joseph is very kind to you, Miss Fenton,' I say boldly, determined not to discuss any little matrimonial plans of our host with her.

She shrugs her shoulders.

'They make a sort of useful maid of me,' she retorts. 'I do the flowers for Lady Yarborough and write letters for Sir Joseph, and hold myself in readiness to trumpet his praises in season and out of season.'

I cannot help smiling at this accurate definition; but I am not going to eat Sir Joseph Yarborough's bread and salt, and pull him to pieces behind his back, so I turn the conversation as unobtrusively as I can by admiring her new tailor-made coat which has been the result of many consultations, seasoned with much-needed advice from Frances and me. She may think me a prig, but I can bear up under it if she does.

Half-way in the mile walk there is a rustic bench, overlooking the river, and there we pause to watch the grey volume of water rushing down.

It is a dull November day and the autumnal rains have swelled the stream; the chestnut leaves dropping one by one, are swiftly whirled away.

'Doesn't the river always make one feel melancholy in winter?' says Eva with a shiver, 'the mists are so dreary. Oh! there's Mr. Mansfield coming to meet us,' and she pulls up her boa, pats down her coat, and preens herself for conquest.

'I have been despatched in search of you, Miss Fenton,' says Mr. Mansfield as he joins us. He always speaks slowly, laboriously even, as if there were a plum in the back of his mouth. 'Sir Joseph is just going to inspect his new silver-grey Dorkings at the farm, and wants you to go with him.'

'Highly flattered,' retorts Eva tartly. 'Do you mean that he is waiting, and that I am to start off at a run, leaving you and Miss Nugent to follow at your ease?'

Judging from Mr. Mansfield's expressive hesitancy, I am afraid this had been somewhat after his original plan.

'How absurd!' I strike in firmly. 'Of course we will all walk back to the house together, and then I should like to go on with you to see the poultry, if Sir Joseph will let me.'

Whereupon we start off at a smart pace; Sir Joseph has spoken and likes not to be kept waiting.

Mr. Mansfield is at my side, but a triangular conversation can scarcely be made tender against the wills of two out of three; half-a-dozen commonplaces, delivered with a lack-lustre, lovelorn gaze, require no parry, and in ten minutes we reach the verandah. Sir Joseph comes down the steps; his eagle eye takes in the situation.

'You are coming to see my Dorkings, Esmé? Mansfield? That is right. Prize birds, my dear Mansfield, prize birds. Dearest Eva, have I ever told you how my young Houdan cock carried off first honours at the Crystal Palace show, in spite of being under age? No, I thought not. Come and walk with me, then.'

I had better resign myself to drop behind with Mr. Mansfield. Even a well-feigned interest in the fortunes of the Houdan cock would be regarded as ill-timed.

'Fond of poultry, Miss Nugent?' inquires Mr. Mansfield. He is evidently inspirited by the presence of his backer, for he boldly delays me at the first garden-gate to detach a bramble from my skirt, and puts his innocent query with an even more tragic expression than usual.

'Not particularly,' and I step out briskly, having fixed three paces behind Sir Joseph and Eva as our utmost boundary; 'I am afraid I haven't a rural mind.'

'But you would be pleased to return to your own county, would you not?'

'That depends,' I rejoin oracularly.

'Of course, I quite understand; not to your uncle's house under the present circumstances, for instance.'

'Not to my uncle's house under the present circumstances,' I repeat grimly.

'How scandalously he has behaved!' ejaculates Mr. Mansfield warmly. 'Sir Joseph tells me your father was the elder brother,

and during his lifetime spent what should have been your inheritance upon the estate, on the distinct understanding that your uncle Francis should make it good to you.'

To flick off the head of a stray dandelion with my walking-stick is my sole response. Mr. Mansfield fancies that he is getting on nicely, however, for he edges a little nearer, and begins again.

'But I can imagine circumstances under which it would be gratifying to your feelings to return to Loamshire. If you had a nice place of your own, for instance?'

'Palace; house, pigstye, barn,' I quote with an unwary laugh. 'I am as likely to have one as the other in Loamshire.'

'I don't know about that,' sinking his voice tenderly. 'I am contemplating the purchase——'

Fortunately the pair in front make a halt at this crisis. Eva has brought Sir Joseph to a full stop in front of an elderly steed turned out to grass hard by, and he has forgotten all minor considerations in a thrilling tale of his prowess in the hunting-field. When we join them he is discoursing of an impossible hedge, flanked by double ditches, which he once charged in obedience to the command of some fair one who was following his lead.

'That horse,' he says, 'took the first ditch splendidly—I need scarcely tell you I never keep an animal that blunders—and, just poised on the narrow ridge, was giving the spring for the second jump, when his hind leg caught in some wire placed there by a scoundrelly farmer. We rolled over together'—dramatically—'my horse and I. It was a terrible fall. When my own doctor examined me shortly after, he used these very words: "Sir Joseph Yarborough," he said, "it would have broken the ribs of any man in England but yourself. *You* have escaped with a few bruises."'

'Wonderful!' exclaims Eva. 'Wire is such a nasty thing, isn't it, Mr. Mansfield?'

'Wonderful!' I exclaim. 'Was the horse hurt, Sir Joseph?'

But in vain. Five minutes afterwards we are walking in our old order, and Mr. Mansfield is endeavouring to catalogue my taste in architecture.

'Now for my own part I like a modern house, square and comfortable,' he says, 'with nice lofty rooms and a fine entrance hall.'

'I hate modern houses,' I rejoin snappishly.

'Ah! Something in the style of Billington, now, would be more to your fancy?'

‘Really, I don’t take much interest in imaginary houses,’ with an ostentatiously smothered yawn.

‘No, but if it were not an imaginary house? As I was remarking just now, I am thinking of buying a place in Loamshire, and I should wish to be guided above all things by your fancy——’

‘How much farther is it to the farm?’ I break in desperately. ‘I’m getting so tired! Oh, here we are! Thank goodness!’ This last *sotto voce*.

CHAPTER IX.

ANOTHER.

THE Dorkings are duly inspected, and Sir Joseph duly offers them to Eva Fenton. They are his latest hobby, but this ceremony of presentation causes her no anxiety as to where she shall lodge the feathered treasures; it is a little *façon de parler* with Sir Joseph to offer everything of which he is possessed to his lady friends, though nothing ever comes of it. During the month I have been here he has laid a score of his belongings at my feet, from a hundred-guinea landscape just come home from Bond Street, down to a pot of red geranium.

At first this gave me genuine uneasiness, as he invariably cut short my protestations with a wave of the hand and a magnificent ‘I will give orders accordingly.’ Up to this time, however, I have made no closer acquaintance with any of the numerous articles so grandiloquently offered me, and I smile sympathetically to see Eva going through the polite farce of exhaustive thanks for the silver-grey Dorkings which—well she knows it—will never cluck out of Sir Joseph’s farmyard.

As we draw near the house on our way home, the fire, lighting up the drawing-room windows, awakens a responsive thrill in my chilled person. I do love a fire, and I think Frances has had the best of it this damp, murky afternoon, with an amusing novel, and her feet on the fender, even though surrounded by yards upon yards of steely blue silk.

There she is, her fluffy head outlined against the flames. It is perked up in a very animated fashion, that little head.

I am wrong about the novel, and her feet are not on the fender. I would swear there is a man in the room, though he be

invisible to my bodily eye. Well do I know the angle of my sister's face and the twist of her body when on conquest bent. Whom can she have got hold of? 'I wish it may be someone who will distract her attention from my affairs,' I soliloquise as I take off my hat and toss it on the sofa in my bedroom. 'I wonder how she would carry all her excellent precepts into practice if one of Sir Joseph's City friends made love to her instead of to me. It is easy enough to talk, but she doesn't know how nasty it is. Pah!'

There is a clatter of tea-cups and a smell of hot tea-cake as I open the drawing-room door. Sir Joseph is assuring someone that he is particularly proud to welcome him to his house; but who that someone is I have not the slightest warning, for I am well inside the door and in full view of everybody before I perceive Allan Vaudrey standing on the hearthrug and looking intently towards me.

My knees turn shaky and a red glow mounts from my chin to the roots of my hair; but the twilight covers this slight deviation from the path of correct maidenly impassibility—at least so I fondly hope—and I manage a cool 'How do you do, Mr. Vaudrey?' and lapse into a low chair without publicly betraying how horribly glad I am to see him.

More I dare not essay. I have an uneasy consciousness that it would sound only natural if I could add with light nonchalance that his call is an unexpected pleasure, and ask him where he is staying, but I dare not trust my voice.

Jacquetta is pouring out tea with all the bustle that can possibly surround that simple ceremony.

'Thank you, Mr. Vaudrey. No, that is Francie's cup, not Esmé's; this is Esmé's with no sugar.'

And my tea-cup is seized by Mr. Mansfield, who presents it and remarks, with a tender sigh, that I must be thirsty after my long walk. He barricades me with toast and pulls his chair in front of mine, somewhat astonished at my limp resignation; but he might be a thousand miles away for all the heed I am bestowing upon him. Over his fat tweed shoulder and past his shiny round head I am stealing happy glances at my dear love.

He has come. He is not a flirt. He does care for me. Dim though the afternoon light may be, I caught the flash in his grey eyes as I came into the room. How nice-looking he is! How tall; how well-made; how broad his shoulders are, how clear his eyes, how straight his features! And what a gentleman he looks!

With what a different air he bears himself from the men I have mixed with the last month.

And so I maunder to myself with ecstatic felicity as he stands in the firelight, plied with word and jest by Frances.

Suddenly one little movement plunges me in a sea of trouble. He takes out his watch, looks at it, and then anxiously at me.

What a fool I am! The precious moments are flying; he will go presently and I shall have said, 'How do you do?' and "Good-bye." There is no time for finessing. I jump up, all but overturning Mr. Mansfield and the toast, and walk boldly across the room to the piano. Some music is littered about, and I begin to put it together without rhyme or reason.

'I don't believe you were a bit glad to see me,' says Mr. Vaudrey, over my shoulder.

'Don't you? Well, I was then.'

The loud buzz of talk at the fireplace covers our voices. Sir Joseph is explaining the merits of a silver-grey Dorking to Frances, and Eva has pounced upon the deserted Mansfield.

'You never asked me where I came from, or how I got here.'

'This is not the uttermost end of the world, and I don't call it a perilous undertaking to get here.'

'Seriously though, I should have looked you up long before this, but my father has been very ill, and I haven't been able to leave him.'

'Has he? I am so sorry!' looking up at him sympathetically.

'Thank you,' he says softly.

'Is he better now?' I ask.

'Just a little, and I have brought him up from Bramblecope to London so as to be within reach of the best doctors. But he is very ill still,' shaking his head sorrowfully.

'I am so sorry!' I repeat, wishing I could think of something more consoling to say; but my monotonous attempts appear to please Mr. Vaudrey, for he smiles a grateful, touched smile under his heavy yellow moustache.

'There is no one at home but me,' he goes on; 'my brother is in India. So you see how it was that I couldn't get here before?' rather anxiously.

'Of course, of course,' I murmur hastily.

'And how are you getting on?' asks Mr. Vaudrey. 'Are they kind to you?' with a backward nod to the fireplace.

‘Very.’

‘He seems a kind old boy; he asked me to stay to dinner this evening, but I must go back by the next train. I haven’t left my father for so long since he was taken ill.’

A pause. I fiddle nervously with the music leaves and wonder when he will come again. This brief glimpse is tantalising.

‘I was awfully disappointed when I found you were out,’ he goes on. ‘I have been here since three o’clock, and I am afraid your sister must have got rather tired of me; but I was determined not to go until you came in. I suggested joining you in the garden, but Miss Frances thought I shouldn’t find you.’

The gilt clock on the mantelpiece strikes six noisily enough under its glass shade.

‘I must go,’ says Mr. Vaudrey, hurriedly looking at his watch. ‘May I come and see you again one day soon?’

‘Yes, do,’ I cry eagerly. ‘But it seems so horrid for you to come down from town just to make an afternoon call’—and I pause awkwardly. Sir Joseph may be the most hospitable of men, but I should not like to take the liberty of inviting anyone to a meal in his house without his permission.’

‘Nonsense! Not at all!’ exclaims Mr. Vaudrey. ‘Besides, I am not sure that I could leave my father for longer, you know.’

But when he says good-bye, Sir Joseph invites him cordially to come again.

‘Staying in town, are you? Then dine and sleep here one day during the week. Any friends of the Nugent family are most welcome to my house. What day shall it be? Next Thursday?’

I am afraid I am more grateful to Sir Joseph for this one invitation, and more inclined to give him a hearty hug—a hug which would unsettle his shirt-front and disarrange his methodical tie—than I have been for the whole month of breakfasts, lunches, and dinners to which he has treated Frances and me. Tra-la-la.

“ Ah ! non giunge uman pensiero
Al contento ond’ io son piena,”

I hum joyously as I run up the stairs to my bedroom. I dare not trust myself to stay in the drawing-room until dressing time. I should giggle out of season and smile when I ought perchance to sigh; Jacquetta and Eva Fenton would look at me curiously and discover that I was suspiciously elated. No, I will make it up at

dinner and during the evening; I will laud Sir Joseph's meanest possession beyond the skies, and I will let Mr. Mansfield glower dismally at me the whole evening; but I must have half an hour with my new happiness first.

I pull a low chair over the burning coals—a fire is so sympathetic—and I con over each moment of the last half-hour.

How low-spirited I was when I walked out of this bedroom last! how little did I think any good thing was in store for me! and how decisive was that glance from Mr. Vaudrey's eyes when I entered the drawing-room—as if the one thing he wanted on earth were just restored to him! Poor fellow! he has been having a trying time too. They have no women-kind at home, and he must have had all the arrangements in connection with Sir Joshua's illness on his hands; men are so awkward in sickness. By-the-bye, I wonder what is the matter with his father? He is evidently very anxious about him. I hope he will be better when Mr. Vaudrey comes next Thursday. Next Thursday! First come Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday; but they will all be happy days with the thought of Thursday gilding them. It is nice of Sir Joseph to have invited him to dine and sleep here. Another afternoon call like this would have been too aggravating. And that reminds me, how ill-natured of Frances to have kept him in the drawing-room from three o'clock till half-past five, when we came in! I know she hates damp like a cat, but I really think she might have brought him out, or even sent him out to me.

Bang, bang. There is Frances' bedroom door; and now she is knocking at mine.

'May I come in? Well, I suppose you are gloating over your young man,' she says derisively.

'I am,' I respond, curt and unashamed; 'and I should have had more to gloat over if you had let me know he was here earlier instead of keeping him all to yourself for two hours and a half. It was very unkind of you, Frances.'

'That depends on what you call unkind,' she answered slowly.

I turn back to the fire. I am too happy to argue with her, though I did feel called upon to give my candid opinion of her unsisterly behaviour; but I am ready to forget it now.

'I should call it unkind to encourage you in your infatuation for Allan Vaudrey when you have the chance—no, the certainty of making a match which is immeasurably better,' says Frances, deliberately sitting down on a low footstool and holding up her

long, slim hands to the flames; Frances' hands are always white and always cold.

'You mean Mr. Mansfield, I suppose?' with an easy smile. I could smile over Beelzebub himself this evening, I am so jovial, and as for Mr. Mansfield, I feel quite compassionately towards him; his rout will be so utter and complete now that Allan Vaudrey has come upon the scene.

'I do,' says Frances emphatically; 'and it passes my understanding how you can be so foolish, Esmé, as to treat him in the way you do. Do you know that he has 20,000*l.* a year?'

'He might have 20,000*l.* a day for all I care,' I respond lightly. Frances groans.

'Why, oh why, does he not look with eyes of favour upon this handmaiden,' pointing to herself, 'instead of upon that?'

'Why not, indeed?' I echo heartily. 'And why don't you practise those little wiles we know so well upon him? You have my sincerest good wishes.'

'As if I had not been doing my very best ever since I first beheld him!' returns Frances candidly. 'All I get for my pains are endless maunderings over your charms. He has just been impressing upon me that your eyes haunt him day and night!'

'Pooh!' I exclaim, and walking across to my toilet table I light the candles; it is not worth while being late for dinner in order to listen to Mr. Mansfield's ravings at second-hand.

My glass reflects a flushed, smiling face; I examine it carefully; I hope I was looking nice when I went into the drawing-room this evening.

'Am I really pretty?' I ask, as I scan my features critically.

'Pretty!' ejaculates my sister scornfully from the fireplace. 'You are lovely.'

'Really, Frances?' I inquire anxiously. 'You are not saying it to please me? I always think my nose is a little sharp at the tip.'

For answer Frances gets up and walks to my side.

'Look at us together,' she says, as coolly and unemotionally as if she were cataloguing two china figures. 'I am only a pretty girl, you are a beauty—there is no doubt about it. The men look at you and they are conquered, whilst I have to toil after and make my little mark by dint of unblushing flattery. And that doesn't always succeed either,' she continues with a sigh; 'witness this afternoon.'

‘Witness this afternoon,’ I repeat, wheeling round sharply upon her. ‘What do you mean?’

‘I thought I would try and distract Mr. Vaudrey’s attention,’ replies Frances unblushingly, ‘but my little attempt was utterly in vain. You needn’t flounce about like that; you must see that our usual rules as to respecting one another’s preserves are suspended by the unusual circumstances in which we are placed; and after all I have extracted some useful information from him which I am ready to retail to you. My efforts to find the precise nature of his respected parent’s malady were fruitless, so I suppose it is something unmentionable; but I have discovered that the old gentleman is really and truly on his last legs. I shouldn’t think he could hang on much longer.’

‘You have been pretty searching in your inquiries,’ I exclaim angrily. ‘I wonder you didn’t ask Mr. Vaudrey the exact figure of his income and what his expectations were.’

‘I should have loved to,’ rejoins my sister placidly, ‘but there exists a foolish prejudice against questions of that kind. Civilisation has its drawbacks; there are lands, I believe, where it is quite compatible with good manners to ask anything one wants to know. Don’t you remember Johnny Rivers told us that in the Argentine Republic it is considered quite the correct thing for all the young ladies to ask new-comers how much they are worth? What heart-burnings so simple a custom must save!’

CHAPTER X.

A COMPACT.

It is Thursday evening. I have spent Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday in endeavouring to propitiate Frances, that on this joyful occasion her lance may not be raised against me. I pray that my efforts be not in vain, but I misdoubt the semi-sarcastic, semi-compassionate gleam with which those blue Japanese eyes have been regarding me.

Mr. Vaudrey, Sir Joseph, and Mr. Mansfield have just arrived from the station and are being regaled with tea and solaced with toast; at least the two latter are, but Mr. Vaudrey has declined the mild refreshment and is hovering around the fireplace in front of my low chair.

Sisterless, unmarried men rarely have tact. Anxious as I am to talk to Mr. Vaudrey, I should have preferred to see him exchange a few mild nothings with Jacquetta first; he might as well ingratiate himself in her good books, and it does not need much trouble on his part to make women like him. He has a taking way, purely natural and in no wise put on, of appearing absorbed and interested in all their little affairs.

'Well, and what have you been doing with yourself since last Sunday?' he asks in a low, appropriative tone.

'Much the same as usual. Walking, driving, eating, and slandering my neighbours, I suppose.'

'Ha, ha!' (He is always appreciative of the flattest joke, which in itself is soothing to the feminine mind, whose humour is generally of the mildest.) 'I hope I wasn't the unhappy neighbour who has been catching it this time?'

'Well, not this time,' I remark, craning my neck up at him—why do the tallest men always stand bolt upright immediately over one's chair? 'One must have a little variety in the object or the game is no fun.'

'I am afraid you mean to imply that at one period or another I *was* the slandered object.' And at last he picks out a chair—needless to say it is the smallest, most infantine of chairs—and pulling it close to my side deposits his large person upon it.

'Of course you were. I remember making some really witty remarks about you last summer.'

'Do you now? I should like to hear one or two of them,' leaning forward with an amused smile.

'Do you mean to tell me you want to hear what your friends say of you behind your back? Your good opinion of yourself must be firmly rooted!'

'Not what *all* my friends say, but what *you* say. Come now, what was the worst thing?'

'The worst thing,' I slowly consider while Mr. Vaudrey gazes at me with the foolish, fond expression proper to a lover—oddly enough, I think it suits his face, though I have never been able to endure it in anyone's else—the worst thing was just about the time you were so devoted to Mrs. Campbell——'

'Devoted to Mrs. Campbell! I!' he interrupts angrily. 'I'll swear I never——'

'I have just been able to secure a Dachshund for you, Miss Nugent,' says Mr. Mansfield, in his slow, indistinct voice. 'He

is a first-rate little chap, and all his relations have taken prizes.' And he calmly plants himself just where Mr. Vaudrey has been standing a few minutes before, and makes a triangle of our *tête-à-tête*.

Allan Vaudrey looks at him sharply, but Mr. Mansfield does not seem to see it. The expression on his round face never does vary in the slightest; he contemplates a pudding and me with the same gaze, and at the present moment appears perfectly unconscious that his society is not wanted.

'I am sure I am very much obliged to you,' I say stiffly, after an expressive pause.

'Not at all. You know very well that my greatest delight is to please you,' in precisely the same monotonous tone.

Mr. Vaudrey gives an angry shuffle, and this time glances quickly at me. Why, oh! why do I foolishly turn scarlet instead of looking calmly disgusted?

'You have never told me yet how Sir Joshua is getting on, Mr. Vaudrey,' calls out Frances from the tea table, 'and Lady Yarborough would like to know what Dr. Jacobson thinks about him.'

And as he moves perforce towards them, my straining ears distinctly catch her arch murmur.

'You must not spoil sport, you know!'

'He is black-and-tan,' continues Mr. Mansfield, 'and just the right size and weight. You prefer black-and-tan, do you not?'

Twenty minutes later the dressing-gong sounds, and I crawl discontentedly upstairs. Not one glance have I had from Allan during the whole twenty minutes.

I will dress quickly and be in the drawing-room before the others,' I determine as I pull off my morning frock; 'I can manage my white gown by myself, and if Frances wants any help it is not I who will give it her!'

But when I reach the drawing-room, panting and with an uncomfortable consciousness that my skirt is somewhat awry, for all my pains I find Jacquetta happily installed and knitting industriously by the shaded lamp.

'How nicely you are getting on with that jersey,' I say, hoping that she will not notice the quaver of disappointment which my own ears hear running through my voice. 'And how pleased old Iken will be to get it!'

'Perhaps,' she answers dubiously; 'but he won't be satisfied by any means. When I told him I was knitting him a jersey the other day, he grumbled out, "Eh, what's the good o' they without long stockings made of new wool to keep a chap's legs warm?"'

One by one the others straggle in, Mr. Vaudrey last of all. I had made up my mind to go straight up and ask him to take me into dinner; but somehow he looks stiffer in his evening clothes, his eyes avoid mine, and he appears all of a sudden to have awakened to a proper sense of the little attentions due to Lady Yarborough.

Dinner is announced. I turn away from Eva Fenton, who is chattering on the hearthrug and fiddle nervously with Jacquetta's ball of wool. There is a good deal in proximity on these occasions, and I am just at Mr. Vaudrey's right arm; Sir Joseph is sitting by Frances on the sofa, and Mr. Mansfield can divide himself between Jacquetta and Miss Fenton as it pleases him.

So I argue rapidly; but, alas! I propose and Frances disposes. Sir Joseph gets up, walks across the room, and presents his arm to me with a flourish.

'What a sweet, dear sister you are blessed with,' he informs me in a whisper on the way to the dining-room. 'She gave me the kindest little hint just now that my beautiful Esmé is a trifle—well, *ever* such a trifle jealous of her rights as elder, and sometimes thinks that Miss Nugent is not given fair precedence over Miss Frances. So like dear Frances to be ready and willing to take the second place, is it not?' Dear Frances completes her pious work by following us with Mr. Mansfield and neatly piloting him into a chair at my right hand; she is also hastily finishing a whispered assurance that Esmé has been so touched by his gift of a Dachshund.

'I daresay she did not half thank you herself, but she is so reserved, you know, almost shy where her feelings are concerned!'

Sir Joseph says a consequential grace, which makes one instinctively feel that the Almighty is highly honoured, and in the pause which ensues I boil over.

'What is that you are saying of me, Frances?' with an angry frown.

'Only that you were so delighted about the Dachshund, Mr. Mansfield has given you, dear,' she returns sweetly. 'It is too kind of him, isn't it, Sir Joseph?'

‘Ah—h! we all know Mansfield can never be *too* kind to Esmé,’ responds Sir Joseph, with a waggish smile.

What is Jaquetta telling Mr. Vaudrey to make him scowl so fiercely? Something that has distracted his attention from our end of the table, I hope.

‘Even my boots I get in the village,’ she exclaims, ‘though they are always badly made and pinch me. But Sir Joseph likes us to spend our money where we live.’

It cannot be this laudable, even heroic patronage of local talent that has roused Mr. Vaudrey’s wrath.

Mournfully I refuse the soup and dismally I shake my head at the fish. Want of pluck, one might say, but I had pinned my hopes to this evening; and now everything seems going wrong. I cannot blame Allan Vaudrey for being angry with me. It is enough to disgust him if he thinks that I have stooped so low as to encourage Mr. Mansfield. Encourage him indeed! Drawing myself up I shoot a withering glance at his round oily head—a withering glance which is utterly thrown away upon him, for he looks up tenderly and remarks that I seem out of sorts this evening and pale.

‘I hope you did not overtire yourself in that charming walk we had together on Sunday afternoon!’ he says with affectionate solicitude.

Nor do I fare any better in the drawing-room after dinner. Directly the gentlemen come in I rise determinedly from my seat and passing close in front of Mr. Vaudrey look up appealingly at him. ‘Won’t you come and open the piano for me?’ I say softly, with pitifully raised eyebrows.

‘I shall be delighted,’ he answers stiffly. But I do not mind the stiffness; if I can only get hold of him for two minutes, it will be all right; for Allan is not of a sulky temper.

‘Where are you off to?’ says Frances, joining us suddenly. ‘To the piano? Oh, dear Esmé, do you mind very much if I ask you not to play this evening? I have such a headache, and I feel as if any noise would make it worse. And Sir Joseph has just been asking for a round game; shall we all gamble a little?’

‘Yes, let us gamble,’ strikes in Mr. Mansfield over my shoulder. ‘Will you bank with me, Miss Nugent?’

‘Don’t say “no,” Esmé; take my advice,’ says Sir Joseph, with a facetious pat on my arm. ‘Mansfield is not a bad fellow to bank with, ha! ha!’

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It is eleven o'clock when we go upstairs. At twelve I am still marching about my room, cursing Mr. Mansfield and Frances with impartial fury. At half-past twelve, my fire having gone out, I betake myself to my little white bed, cold though wrathful. One o'clock strikes; half-past one; two. I sit up in bed; anger is taking the second place, and a great fear fills my mind. What if I really lose my love? What if he goes away in foolish misunderstanding to-morrow morning and we never meet again? And can I be sure that I shall have the opportunity of undeceiving him? Have I not tried to edge in a word this evening, all in vain? How can I tell that I shall fare better in the short hour before he leaves to-morrow? No, pride must go to the wall, and I will throw myself on Frances' mercy. She *shall* help me.

I hurl myself out of bed and, too excited to wrap up, rush into Frances' room.

She is fast asleep of course. Neither emotion nor indigestion ever play havoc with Frances' slumbers.

'Wake up, Frances, wake up!' I cry, shaking her ruthlessly by the shoulder, 'I want to talk to you.'

'Good heavens! What's the matter? Is it you, Esmé? Oh! do take that candle out of my eyes. What do you want?'

'I want to talk to you,' I repeat more slowly, for I am gradually awakening to the consciousness that it is bitterly cold and that the draught playing upon my feet from under the door is positively arctic; 'and as I have a good deal to say I think I had better get into your bed.'

'Ugh! you are quite froggy!' grumbles Frances as she flattens herself against the wall to avoid the touch of my chilled limbs. 'And what on earth do you want to say that won't keep till the morning? Ugh! How disagreeable you are!'

'And how disagreeable you have been all the evening, Frances!' I retort lachrymosely, my mental woes rushing back upon me with renewed vigour, now that my bodily discomfort is alleviated. 'What have I done that you should be so cruel to me! Oh, Frances, you must help me! I am so miserable I don't know what to do.'

Frances gives an angry shuffle; whether to shake away the frozen hand with which I am seeking hers or from annoyance at my tears, I know not.

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'Don't be unkind to me, dear Frances,' I plead; 'you don't

know how fond I am of Mr. Vaudrey, and what shall I do if he goes away in anger?’

‘Marry Mr. Mansfield of course,’ returns my sister tartly.

‘That I never will!’ I exclaim with vicious energy. ‘*Never*, no never! I will go out as a governess first.’

‘Not you,’ says Frances with a derisive laugh. ‘Foolish you may be, but not quite so foolish as that.’

I pause. It is no use arguing with Frances. I must try another plan. ‘Now listen to me, Frances,’ I say firmly, ‘and I can tell you I mean what I say. If you don’t help me about Allan Vaudrey I will never forgive you as long as I live, and whomsoever I marry you shall never set foot inside my doors.’

‘Hoity-toity!’ ejaculates my sister; but there is an uneasy ring about her giggle which tells me that my shot has gone home.

‘Whereas, on the other hand, if you help me and I marry Allan Vaudrey I will be grateful to you all my life, and you shall come and live with us, dear Frances, and we will love you so much.’

‘Love will have to be our portion then,’ she sneers; ‘our fuel, board and lodging.’

‘Nonsense! I don’t know why you should persist in saying that Mr. Vaudrey will have no money. His father is dying, as you know, and he is a millionaire.’

There is another long pause. I am half afraid Frances has dropped off to sleep in spite of her cramped position, but presently she speaks.

‘I suppose I must make a bargain with you,’ she says. ‘If his father leaves him a decent fortune I will do all I can to help you; and you must promise me that if he is left badly off you will give up all idea of marrying him.’

‘Well, we will see,’ I rejoin discreetly, feeling that for the moment I have gained my point and that sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. ‘We have plenty of time before us to talk that over, and you will be nice to us to-morrow morning, like a darling, won’t you, Francie? I *should* so like to have a little chat with him before he goes.’

‘All right,’ she says ungraciously, with a gigantic yawn; ‘anything to get you out of my bed now.’

I verily believe that it is entirely owing to my making her

uncomfortable that I have been able to wrest any terms from Frances.

'Well, I am going,' I rejoin, slipping gently out and seizing my candlestick. 'Bless you, oh my sister! And in return I will do my best to lay my big dolly with the round black eyes and 20,000*l.* a year at your feet. Henceforth I devote myself to making him understand how far more desirable a wife you would be for him than I.'

'Mind you shut the door,' says Frances.

(To be continued.)

SNOW, FROST, STORM, AND AVALANCHE.

STUDIES OF WINTER IN THE GRISONS.

I.

It is well-nigh impossible, while treating of Alpine scenery in winter, to avoid monotony. The snow-world is colourless and almost formless; and to describe things which have no shape or hue strains the resources of language. Besides, the life of human beings in these mountains—the life, that is to say, of the children of the fells and workers in the forests—has a singular intensity, a serious abiding sense of man's relation to the material universe, which is unknown to the inhabitants of flat countries and temperate climates. Language fails in the attempt to reproduce impressions and moods of the mind, which are thrilling enough in the midst of this austere simple nature, but which have nothing to do with common experience upon the highways of the world. It is as difficult to write adequately about the winter Alps and mountaineers as about the stormy ocean and sailors.

The winter of 1887–88 was unusually severe over Northern and Central Europe. In the Canton of Graubünden it was exceptional, for three main reasons—the large amount of snow which fell; the long continuance of intense cold; and the frequency of avalanches, by which many lives were lost and vast damage was inflicted upon property. Dr. Ludwig, of Pontresina, in his 'Meteorological Report' for February, says: 'It is an ascertained fact that the oldest people do not remember such a long, severe winter, with so much snow, so many snow-storms, and so little sun. The same is the case with this winter's avalanches, which have excelled in number and size all previously recorded in this district, and in several instances have fallen in unusual tracks.'

The reason why avalanches were exceptional in size and numbers, and why they came down in unexpected quarters, can be explained. Only a moderate amount of snow fell in the autumn and early winter; about New Year there was considerably less than the average quantity. On the heights of the mountains this coating of scanty snow hardened, under the action of sun, wind, and intense frost, into a smooth, solid, icy crust. Therefore, when

a heavy snowfall began in February, which lasted without intermission for six days and nights, accumulating an average depth of five or six feet on the crust of earlier snow I have described, this new deposit was everywhere insecure. It slipped in immense masses from the polished surface of the old snow, having no support, no roughnesses to which it could adhere, and rushed by its own weight into the valleys at points where ordinary and more slowly acting causes are not wont to launch the thunderbolts of winter. For the same reason, successive avalanches descended upon the same tracks. As soon as one deposit had glided from its slippery ice-foundation and another snow-fall happened, the phenomenon was repeated; the crust of old snow still remaining treacherously firm and smooth upon the steep declivities. A postilion, who drove the post all this winter over the Fluela Pass (the highest in Graubünden, and the highest which is open for regular winter traffic in Europe), told me that he had counted between fifty and sixty avalanches, which traversed the actual post road, and some of these were repeated half a dozen times. As the same conditions affected all the other passes of Graubünden—Bernina, Albula, Julier, Splügen, and Bernhardin—it will readily be conceived that traffic was occasionally suspended for several days together, that the arrivals and departures of the post were irregular, and that many lives were sacrificed. Singularly enough, no fatal accidents happened to the Swiss post-service. Those who suffered were men employed to mend the roads, carters, and peasants engaged in felling wood. Few valleys in the canton escaped without the loss of some lives, and the tale is still incomplete; for the most remote regions were entirely shut off for months together from the outer world by enormous avalanches, which interrupted all communications. We do not yet know, and, unless an official report be published on the subject, we shall probably never know how many human beings fell victims to the fury of the elements this winter.

If we may speak of avalanche-showers in the same way as we speak of meteor-showers, it is possible to distinguish two great occurrences of this kind in the spring of 1888. They grouped themselves around two dates, February 16–17, and March 27–28. Intermittently, and sporadically, avalanches fell throughout the canton almost daily in the months of February, March, and April. Some of the more destructive cannot be reckoned to the main showers I have mentioned. Yet the dates given above mark distinct crises in the avalanche-plague; and for two well-defined

meteorological reasons. Between February 4 and February 9, snow fell continuously and universally, heaping up, as I have already described, immense stores of soft unsettled drifts upon the smooth surface of the autumn deposit. Given calm frost-weather for a period of several weeks, this large snow-fall might have hardened in its turn, until the warm breezes of April loosened it in Schlag-Lawinen. That, however, did not happen. Soon after the snow was down, storms set in; the Föhn-wind raged upon the heights and swooped into the valleys. The mountains were stirred through all their length and breadth, and Staub-Lawinen poured like torrents from the precipices. That caused the avalanche-shower of February 16-17. The second shower of March 27-28 was due to somewhat different causes. Much of the snow had been dislodged from places where the Föhn-wind played its wild capricious games in February. But incalculable masses still remained unshaken; and upon these a violent and general rain-storm acted at the end of March. The result was that millions of tons of snow, sodden with rain, got slowly into motion, and discharged themselves in Schlag-Lawinen down the gullies of the hills. The exact meaning of these technical terms, Staub-Lawinen and Schlag-Lawinen, will be presently explained. For the moment, I must beg my readers to understand that the avalanche-shower of February differed in some essential respects from that of March. It is also worthy of notice that the valleys on the southern side of the watershed, Mesocco, Calanca, Bregaglia, Poschiavo, suffered far more in the second shower, while the greatest damages upon the northern side, on the main post-roads, and so forth, were inflicted by the earlier.

Though I possess considerable data for describing in detail the main features of the avalanche-showers of 1888, as they affected Graubünden, I feel that I should only perplex and weary English people by directing their attention to places the very names of which are unfamiliar. Besides, I should prolong this article, which promises already to become unwieldy, beyond the dimensions of an occasional essay. I propose, therefore, to confine myself to general observations about the several sorts of avalanches, and to illustrations from my personal experience which may help to bring their dangers vividly before my readers.

II.

THERE are several sorts of avalanches, which have to be distinguished, and which are worthy of separate descriptions. One is called *Staub-Lawine*, or Dust-Avalanche. This descends when snow is loose and has recently fallen. It is attended with a whirlwind, which lifts the snow from a whole mountain-side and drives it onward through the air. It advances in a straight line, overwhelming every obstacle, mowing forests down like sedge, leaping (as an old peasant once expressed it in my hearing) from hill to hill, burying men, beasts, and dwellings, and settling down at last into a formidable compact mass without colour and without outline. The snow which forms these *Staub-Lawinen* is dry and finely powdered. When it comes to rest upon the earth it immediately hardens into something very like the consistency of ice, wrapping the objects which have been borne onward by its blast tightly round in a firm implacable clasp. A man or horse seized by a *Staub-Lawine*, if the breath has not been blown out of his body in the air, has it squeezed out by the even, clinging pressure of consolidating particles. A human victim of the dreadful thing, who was so lucky as to be saved from its clutch, once described to me the sensations he experienced. He was caught at the edge of the avalanche just when it was settling down to rest, carried off his feet, and rendered helpless by the swathing snow, which tied his legs, pinned his arms to his ribs, and crawled upward to his throat. There it stopped. His head emerged, and he could breathe; but as the mass set, he felt the impossibility of expanding his lungs, and knew that he must die of suffocation. At the point of losing consciousness, he became aware of comrades running to his rescue. They hacked the snow away around his thorax, and then rushed on to dig for another man who had been buried in the same disaster, leaving him able to breathe, but wholly powerless to stir hand or foot. This narrative reminded me of an anecdote told by Haydon the painter, who nearly sacrificed a negro's life by attempting to take an entire cast of the man's body at one moment from the feet to the chin. When the plaster-of-Paris began to set the negro could not breathe, and he was only saved from asphyxiation by Haydon's tearing down the mould of brick in which he had been placed.

Another sort of avalanche is called the *Schlag-Lawine*, or

Stroke-Avalanche. It falls generally in spring-time, when the masses of winter snow have been loosened by warm winds or sodden by heavy rainfalls. The snow is not whirled into the air, but slips along the ground, following the direction given by ravines and gullies, or finding a way forward through the forest by its sheer weight. Lumbering and rolling, gathering volume as they go from all the barren fells within the reach of their tenacious undermining forces, these 'slogging' avalanches push blindly onward till they come to rest upon a level. Then they spread themselves abroad, and heap their vast accumulated masses by the might of pressure from behind up into pyramids and spires. They bear the aspect of a glacier with its seracs, or of a lava-stream with its bristling ridges; and their skirts are plumed with stately pine-trees, nodding above the ruin they have wrought. Woe to the fragile buildings, to the houses and stables, which they meet upon their inert grovelling career! These are carried with them, incorporated, used as battering-rams. Grooving like the snout of some behemoth, the snow dislodges giants of the forest, and forces them to act like ploughs upon its path. You may see tongues and promontories of the avalanche protruding from the central body, and carried far across frozen lakes or expanses of meadow by the help of some huge pine or larch. The Schlag-Lawine is usually white and softer in substance than its more dreadful sister, the Staub-Lawine—that daughter of the storm, with the breath of the tornado in her brief delirious energy. It is often distinguished by a beautiful bluish colour, as of opaque ice, in the fantastically-toppling rounded towers which crown it; whereas the Schlag-Lawine looks like marble of Carrara, and presents a uniform curved surface after it has fallen. Though the Schlag-Lawine closely resembles a glacier at first sight, practised eyes detect the difference at once by the dulled hue which I have mentioned, and by the blunted outlines of the pyramids. It might be compared to a glacier which had been sucked or breathed upon by some colossal fiery dragon. Less time has gone to make it; it is composed of less elaborated substance, it has less of permanence in its structure than a glacier; and close inspection shows that it will not survive the impact of soft southern winds in May. In extent these Schlag-Lawinen are enormous. I have crossed some which measured a thousand feet in breadth and more than sixty feet in depth. All road-marks, telegraph-posts, parapets, &c., are of course abolished. The trees, if trees there were

upon their track, have been obliterated. Broken stumps, snapped off like matches, show where woods once waved to heaven. Valleys are made even with the ridges which confined them. Streams are bridged over and converted into temporary lakes by the damming up of water.

A species of the Schlag-Lawine may be distinguished, to which the name of *Grund-Lawine*, or ground-avalanche, shall be given. There is no real distinction between *Schlag-* and *Grund-Lawine*. I only choose to differentiate them here because of marked outward differences to the eye. The peculiarity of a *Grund-Lawine* consists in the amount of earth and rubble carried down by it. This kind is filthy and disreputable. It is coloured brown or slaty-grey by the rock and soil with which it is involved. Blocks of stone emerge in horrid bareness from the dreary waste of dirty snow and slush of water which compose it; and the trees which have been so unlucky as to stand upon its path are splintered, bruised, rough-handled in a hideous fashion. The Staub-Lawine is fury-laden like a fiend in its first swirling onset, flat and stiff like a corpse in its ultimate repose of death, containing men and beasts and trees entombed beneath its stern unwrinkled taciturnity of marble. The Schlag-Lawine is picturesque, rising into romantic spires and turrets, with erratic pine-plumed firths protruded upon sleepy meadows. It may even lie pure and beautiful, heaving in pallid billows at the foot of majestic mountain slopes where it has injured nothing. But the Grund-Lawine is ugly, spiteful like an asp, tatterdemalion like a street-Arab; it is the worst, the most wicked of the sisterhood. To be killed by it would mean a ghastly death by scrunching and throttling, as in some grinding machine, with nothing of noble or impressive in the winding-sheet of foul snow and débris heaped above the mangled corpse.

I ought to mention a fourth sort of avalanche, which is called Schnee-Rutsch or snow-slip. It does not differ materially from the Schlag-Lawine except in dimension, which is smaller, and in the fact that it may fall at any time and in nearly all kinds of weather by the mere detachment of some trifling mass of snow. The Schnee-Rutsch slides gently, expanding in a fan-like shape upon the slope it has to traverse, till it comes to rest upon a level. Small as the slip may be, it is very dangerous; for it rises as it goes, catches the legs of a man, lifts him off his feet, and winds itself around him in a quiet but inexorable embrace. I once

saw a coal-cart with two horses swept away by a very insignificant Schnee-Rutsch, while standing at my window in the Hôtel Belvédère at Davos Platz. The man and one horse kept their heads above the snow and were extricated. The other horse was dead before he could be dug out. There is a Davos proverb to the effect that 'a pan of snow may kill a man ;' and certainly the incident which I have just mentioned, occurring on a public road in Davos Platz, and close beneath the windows of one of its chief hotels, corroborates the proverb. While crossing the higher passes in sledges, where the road is often carried at a vast altitude along precipitous slopes with a width of less than five feet for the vehicle to move upon, a snow-slip of this kind may cause very serious accidents. Yet I ought not to speak ill of Schnee-Rutschen ; for I have started them myself upon the declivities of the hills above Davos, and have ridden down on them to my great delight, feeling the snow surge and swell beneath me like a horse or wave, until our breathless descent was over, and we stood nine feet above the level ground which brought us to quiescence. These, however, were tame, carefully-chosen, carefully-calculated snow-slips ; far different from such as leap upon the traveller unaware, and flick him, as a towel flicks a fly, from precipice into river-bed.

Having now described the principal kinds of avalanches, it may be well to give some further details about their structure and the damage they inflict. I enjoyed an excellent opportunity last March of inspecting the interior of a Staub-Lawine, which fell in the valley of Davos below the village of Glarus. At its deepest point, it lay about sixty feet above the post road, and a gallery had been bored through it with great labour for the passage of sledges. The walls of this tunnel were a compact mass of compressed snow, which the workmen cut into with pickaxes. You could make no impression on it with your fingers, and the marks of the pick were as sharp as on a block of marble. I noticed the following objects embedded in the portion of the avalanche exposed to view : large and small fragments of gneiss and limestone ; occasionally a huge boulder ; trunks of trees, mostly larch and pine, sawn flush with the snow-walls ; branches, innumerable twigs of cembra, larch, spruce, fir, and alder, so evenly distributed over the whole surface that the trees from which they had been torn must have been stripped by the whirl of wind and snow-dust ; these fragments were so firmly clutched that you could not scoop

them out; lastly, and most impressive, massive blocks of pure transparent ice, one of them six feet in length, three feet in depth, and how broad I do not know. This ice must have been torn by the blast from frozen waterfalls in the gullies of the Rutschobel. The avalanche probably started at some 3,000 feet above the Landwasser, descending from a district known as the Ausserberg, which is dominated by the two peaks of the Leidschhorn and Aelpihorn.

It was clear on seeing how stones, stems, branches, twigs, blocks of ice, &c. were firmly wrought into the snow-mass, that a man's body would be inextricably clasped by the same frozen substance. Standing in the gallery and reflecting on these things, I remembered with a thrill of awe that somewhere or another, at no great distance, the corpse of a man lay actually embedded there. He was called Caspar Valär; and he had been buried in the avalanche upon February 7. Gangs of peasants to the number of fifty had dug incessantly for seven days in the hopes of alighting on his body. Passing along the road, we had seen them at the stream-side, sounding the snow with poles, breaking it up with pickaxes, and delving into it with spades; and their sad resigned faces told how they sorrowed for their comrade. His fate might so easily be theirs too! The savage Alpine winter claims its victims yearly. Therefore, *hodie tibi cras mihi, quod eras sum quod es ero* (to-day for thee, to-morrow for me; what thou wast I am, what thou art I shall be) seemed written on their earnest features. At last this labour of the search, willingly and without wage given by the men of Glarus, had to be abandoned as impracticable. Caspar Valär was left to slumber in his icy sepulchre, until the melting avalanche relaxed its hold in spring-time. His widow, meanwhile, with two young children, went on living in their wooden chalet on the hill which overlooks the dreadful thing which robbed her of her husband. On the third of May she gave birth to a stillborn child; and on the same day her husband's corpse was brought to light. He had been carried across the stream by the rush of the Staub-Lawine, and his body was in excellent preservation.

Strange things are related of corpses which lie, like Caspar Valär's, for three months or more in avalanches. A man, on whose veracity I can count, told me that he knew a pair of brothers, one of whom was swept away by a Staub-Lawine. The other dug him out in the spring-time, and found the corpse with a thick curling

beard. Yet he remembered perfectly well that, on the day before his brother met his death, they had both of them shaved together. Of this he was confident ; and he told my informant the particular with every mark of circumstantiality.

To be well embedded in an avalanche is better than to be immured, as sometimes happens, in a cranny of cliff or cavern which the avalanche has sealed by passing over it. Horrible stories are whispered regarding the bodies of men who have slowly died of hunger in such circumstances. Yet, so long as life lasts, there is always hope ; no pains are spared in ransacking the snow where human beings may be breathing their last ; and cases of almost miraculous deliverance occasionally occur. Last February a young man called Domiziano Roberti in the neighbourhood of Giornico saw an avalanche descending on him. He crept under a great stone, above which there fell a large tree in such a position that it and the stone together roofed him from the snow, which soon swept over him and shut him up. There he remained 103 hours, in a kind of semi-somnolence, and was eventually dug out, speechless and frightfully frost-bitten, but alive.

I find another still more curious story of salvation from the snow-death on my notes. There is an elderly man at Küblis in the Prätigau, unless perchance he died last winter, who haunted the village public-house and was only too ready to relate the following experience of his earlier days. The Fluela Pass, which is now a post-road, was in those years a mere bridle-path in summer, while in winter the people brought wine from the Valtelline across it on horseback or on little sledges not much larger than what we wrongly call toboggans now. The man in question, whom I will christen Hans Truog, though that is not his actual name, had been enveloped in a Schnee-Rutsch while making his way upward from the Engadine one stormy day in February. His body, disentangled from the snow, stark and livid, was carried to the Hospiz, and there left for dead. Hans was a native of the Prätigau, and soon after this had happened, another man from Prätigau came in behind him, bound for Davos, and their home in the same valley. We will call him, for the sake of clearness, Christian Caduff. The folk of the refuge asked this Christian whether he would carry the dead man back to their common village in the Prätigau. Christian looked at the corpse, recognised the features of Hans Truog, and replied that he was willing to do so ; but that, Hans having been a surly, ill-conditioned

fellow in his lifetime, it would serve him well to drag his dead body down at the tail of the wine-sledge. Accordingly he lashed the frozen body firmly with rope to the end of his own sledge, and after refreshing himself with wine in the Hospiz, set off at a quick trot across the snow to Tschuggen, a lonely inn about half-way between the Fluela and Davos Dörfli. The snow upon these mountain tracks is very smooth and easy to glide over; therefore poor Hans Truog risked no injury to head or limb, as he swiftly followed his churlish conductor's chariot. Nor was Christian Caduff so savage as Achilles when he dragged dead Hector round the walls of windy Troy through sand and stones. What could the tightly knotted cords about the ankles matter to a corpse? When Christian Caduff reached Tschuggen, he unyoked his horse and looked to his wine-barrels, intending to pass the night there, for evening had already fallen. He also proceeded to untie the body of Hans Truog, and stow it in the stable; humanity touched his stolid heart so far at least as not to leave a dead man under moon and stars. But what was his amazement when he perceived that the corpse was stirring, drowsily shifting as in some uneasy dream. Having disentangled it from the sledge and drawn it into the warm living-room, Hans gradually revived. The most he suffered from was the injury to his swollen and frost-bitten feet. This kept him several weeks at Tschuggen. But eventually he was able to walk home to Prätigau, where he lives, as I have said, to tell the tale. Christian Caduff, on the other hand, has long since joined his forefathers in the village graveyard. Had it not been for this man's churlishness, had Christian placed the corpse beside him on the wine-sledge, in all probability Hans Truog would never have revived from his frost-sleep. Each minute in the cold air would have congealed the blood in his torpid veins more thoroughly, whereas the rapid passage of his body across the snow, the strong continuous friction of his skin, brought the blood again to the surface and stimulated vital circulation. Therefore to the barbarity of his neighbour he owed that life which the brute force of the avalanche had casually spared.

I have frequently mentioned the blast which avalanches bring with them, and which runs before the snow-mass like a messenger of death. This phenomenon of the 'Lawinen-Dunst,' as it is called, deserves some illustration. The fact is well authenticated, but its results seem almost incredible. Therefore I will confine myself to details on which I can positively rely. A carter, whom

I know well for an honest fellow, told me that he was driving his sledge with two horses on the Albula Pass, when an avalanche fell upon the opposite side of the gorge. It did not catch him. But the blast carried him and his horses and the sledge at one swoop over into deep snow, whence they emerged with difficulty. Another man, whom I count among my friends here, showed me a spot in the Schanfigg valley (between Chur and the Strela Pass) where one of his female relatives had been caught by the Lawinen-Dunst. She was walking to church when this happened, the people of her hamlet having taken the same path about a quarter of an hour before. The blast lifted her into the air, swept her from the road, and landed her at the top of a lofty pine, to which she clung with all the energy of desperation. The snow rushed under her and left the pine standing. It must have been an inconsiderable avalanche. Her neighbours, on their way back from church, saw her clutching for bare life to the slender apex of the tree, and rescued her. Many such cases could be mentioned. A road-maker, named Schorta, this winter (February 17, 1888), was blown in like manner into the air below Brail in the Engadine, and saved himself by grappling to a fir-tree; else he would have been dashed to pieces against the face of a precipice; as it was he only lost his hat. I have been shown a place near Ems, in the Rhine valley, above Chur, where a miller's house was carried bodily some distance through the air by the Lawinen-Dunst. Its inhabitants were all killed, except an old man about sixty and an infant of two years. Again, I may mention that the tower of the monastery at Dissentis was on one occasion blown down by the same cause. Cases are frequently met with where walls of houses, windows and doors, have been smashed in by the wind of avalanches falling on the opposite flank of a narrow ravine.¹ I have myself seen a house wrecked by a Staub-Lawine, its roof removed in one piece by the blast, and its back wall and one side stove in by the weight of snow and stones and tiles which followed.

In order to understand the force of the Lawinen-Dunst, we must bear in mind that hundreds of thousands of tons of snow are

¹ I quote this sentence from the *Davoser Wochenblatt* of March 7, 1888: 'In Misox hat der Luftdruck einer Lawine, die unmittelbar neben dem Dorfe niederging, an einer ganzen Anzahl von Häusern die Wände eingedrückt.' Misox or Mesocco is the chief place in the valley of that name, on the Italian side of the San Bernardino Pass.

suddenly set in motion in contracted chasms. The air displaced before these solid masses acts upon objects in their way like breath blown into a pea-shooter. From certain appearances in the torn and mangled trees which droop disconsolately above ravines down which an avalanche has thundered, it would also appear that the draught created by its passage acts like a vortex, and sucks in the stationary vegetation on either hand.

I will follow up these general details with a circumstantial account of what occurred here on February 6 last. The Fluela Pass, which connects Davos with the Lower Engadine, was closed to traffic on that day. But a man with whom I was acquainted, called Anton Broher (nicknamed the 'Schaufel-Bauer,' or 'Knave of Spades,' because of his black bushy beard), had started for the pass before this fact was generally known. Just before noon an avalanche caught him at a spot where avalanches rarely if ever fall, within a short distance of the inn at Tschuggen. An eyewitness saw him carried by the blast, together with his horse and sledge, two hundred yards in the air across the mountain stream. The snow which followed buried him. He was subsequently dug out dead, with his horse dead, and the sledge beside him. The harness had been blown to ribbons in the air, for nothing could be found of it except the head-piece on the horse's neck.

I was curious to survey the spot where this had happened. Accordingly, when the state of the road permitted, I proceeded to the scene of action. Avalanches had fallen all along the opposite side of the valley in a continuous line, blocking up the river. The snow-banks over which I crawled were strewn with branches of cembra whirled across the ravine by the Lawinen-Dunst, and with boughs, twigs, débris of all sorts, torn from the larches under which I passed. In some places there was quite a heap of fire-wood brought together, and not a tree appeared uninjured. I extricated the leader of a fine young spruce, about eight feet long, from a snow-drift, and could see the broken stem from which it had been wrenched across the water, in a direct line, at the distance of at least a thousand feet. The blast of the avalanches seemed to have exerted a sweeping upward force upon our side of the valley, as though, descending from the other side, it had been thwarted and compelled to ascend for want of space. The boughs from the torn trees were lifted into the snow at some height above us, and their cleavage showed that the wrench had come from below. When I reached the avalanche which carried Anton

Broher across the water and killed him, I was astonished by its smallness and by the space he had traversed in the air. Yet there was the hole upon the other side, close to the stream, out of which his corpse, with horse and sledge, had been excavated.

Thanks to the prudence of our forefathers, villages are rarely placed in peril from avalanches. If we could read into the prehistoric annals of the canton, it would be found, I think, that long before the Romans came here with their conquering legions, the safest sites for human habitation had been already selected and occupied through several centuries. Yet the elements are not to be depended on, and a few cases have occurred this winter in which whole communities have been exposed to the direst danger. I will select one instance as a specimen. Selma is a village of the Calancathal, which diverges, not far above Bellinzona, from the main valley of Mesocco to the north-west. On February 26 three avalanches descended on this spot. The largest fell at seven in the morning. The inhabitants of the opposite village, Landarenca, who had better opportunities for observing changes in the snow upon the heights above Selma, saw that a catastrophe was about to happen. They rang a tocsin on their church bells which alarmed the folk of Selma. Rushing out of their houses, these poor people were deafened with the roar of the descending snow-mass. It swept onward, ploughing up their woods, gathering in volume and in speed, until it broke upon the solid building of their church. This bore the brunt of the attack and was demolished. But it acted like a breakwater. The avalanche, arrested in its course, yet not brought to quiescence, surged round the church and poured into the village. Houses were buried and partly shattered. On reckoning their numbers the escaped villagers perceived that four persons were missing—three women and an old man of eighty. One woman was subsequently discovered alive behind the stove of her shattered kitchen. A second was buried in a stable and extricated alive. A third had also taken refuge in a stable, whence she was dug out. The old man remained in bed with the snow piled high above him. He wondered that the night lasted so long, and was astonished when the rescue party came and hauled him through a window out upon a tunnel they had excavated to his dwelling.¹

The Calancathal, in which this happened, suffered severely later in the spring. On March 31 eight great avalanches swept

¹ See *Freier Rhätier*, March 10, 1888.

at once into it from both sides, burying houses and stables. The telegraph announcing this catastrophe ran as follows:—'Calanca-thal is one huge avalanche.'¹

It is worthy of observation that Schlag-Lawinen are comparatively slow in movement, and give intimations of their coming. This accounts for the fact that, while great damage is done to buildings, human lives are rarely sacrificed in considerable numbers. Fetan, in the Lower Engadine (between Schuls and Süss), is an upland village, which has suffered cruelly from both fire and snow; and its history may be worth recording.² In the year 1682 a great avalanche swept over it. Six persons were killed, but the rest of the villagers, expecting some such catastrophe, had abandoned their houses. In one dwelling nothing was left standing but the living-room and one bedroom. These, however, contained the mother of the family and all her children, who escaped unhurt. In 1720 an avalanche demolished fifteen houses at one swoop. In one of them, a party of twenty-six young men and women were assembled. They were all buried in the snow, and only three survived. Altogether thirty-six persons perished at that time, of whom thirty-two were consigned to a common grave upon the 11th of February. In 1812 a similar catastrophe occurred, destroying houses and stables. But on this occasion the inhabitants had been forewarned and left the village. A curious story is told about the avalanche of 1812. One of the folk of Fetan, after abandoning his homestead to its fate, remembered that he had forgotten to bring away his Bible. The man was named Nuot Cla, or vulgarly Nuot Sar Chasper. In the teeth of the impending danger, through the dark night, he waded back across the snow-drifts, and saved the precious volume. Nearly the whole of Fetan was consumed by a conflagration on September 23, 1885, and this year it has again been devastated by avalanches. Yet the people stick to their old site, rebuilding their dwellings which the elements destroy.

It would be easy to multiply details of this kind. The annals of Davos, where I am writing, abound in striking records of the avalanches of past years. I will confine myself to a single extract from one of the local chronicles, which, though it has the air of legend, may well be founded on a real historical event. There was a family living at Ob-Laret, beyond Wolfgang, on the road to Klosters, in a wooden chalet, which was entirely submerged by

¹ *Freier Rätier*, April 1.

² *Ibid.* March 6.

snow and avalanche. They could not extricate themselves with all their toil, and soon consumed the provisions which the house contained. Famine stared them in the face. The mother of the family, in this dire contingency, decided that one member should be sacrificed for the benefit of all. But first she brought her children together in prayer, and then drew lots. The lot fell upon a little girl, who knelt down and declared her willingness to yield her life up; when suddenly a loud noise in the chimney was heard, and a chamois came tumbling down into their midst. This animal removed the necessity of human sacrifice, provided an immediate supply of food, and indicated a way out into the open air.

III.

I CANNOT do better than continue these observations with some account of my personal experiences upon the mountain roads. With this object in view, it will be well to describe the mode of travelling in use here. The snow-tracks which cross the higher passes are very narrow; and for this reason, little low open sledges drawn by one horse are commonly employed. The sledge is a box, shaped somewhat like a car in a merry-go-round, into which a pair of travellers are shut by means of a wooden frame or lid moving up and down on hinges. This lid rises to the breast of a seated person, and protects his legs from falling snow. The upper part of his body is exposed. When the sledge upsets, which is not unfrequently the case, the whole falls quietly upon one side, and discharges its contents. The wooden frame or lid, being movable upon its hinges, enables a man to disengage himself without difficulty. The driver stands upon a ledge behind, passing the reins between the shoulders of the passengers. There are no springs to the vehicle, which bumps and thumps solidly in the troughs of the road, dispelling all illusions as to the facile motion of a sledge. If it is needful to pass another vehicle, the horse plunges up to his belly in soft snow upon one side, then struggles furiously, gains his feet, and lifts the sledge with quick spasmodic effort to the beaten track again. These sledges carry no luggage. A second horse is used, who follows close behind, and draws a truck on runners laden with all kinds of baggage. He has no driver; and the result is that these luggage-sledges frequently upset. It is always safest to travel with the post in winter,

because the horses know each yard of the road from one stage to another. But a nervous traveller may even thus be exposed to trials of his courage; for economy makes the postmaster provide the smallest possible number of postilions, and passengers are sometimes sent across a mountain in a sledge without a driver, following the sledge in front. I once crossed the Julier in a dark night of January, without a postilion and without any reins to guide the horse by. My reason told me that the beast knew his business better than I did. But, none the less, I felt forlornly helpless when he was floundering about in depths of snow I could not realise. It is always best to take things as they come, however; and I comforted myself by reflecting that even an Englishman is a parcel which postmasters are bound to deliver safely at its destination.

Some of the pleasantest days of my life have been spent in these post-sledges on the passes of Graubünden. The glory of unclouded sunlight, the grimness of storm, and the mystery of midnight among the peaks of Albula, Fluela, Julier, Bernina, Maloja, Splügen, Bernhardin are known to me through them. They are not luxurious; but I can recommend them with authority in preference to the stuffy top-heavy closed carriages on runners which the inexperience of foreigners is now bringing into fashion. Though I have been out in very bad weather in these open sledges I never took any harm. The following notes of a day's journey on March 13, 1888, show that the risk of catching cold may be considerable; yet I would back myself to catch cold in a German or Swiss railway-carriage more easily at the same season of the year. 'I drove in an open sledge from Landquart to Davos, about nine hours, while it snowed incessantly, thick wet snow, very soft and sweet to breathe in, lovely on the woods of beech and pine, fantastic on the blue-green frozen cataracts. A dreamy day of long grey pearly distances, snow-laden orchards, hamlets slumbering in snow, and tall fir-forests drooping their snow-laden branches over me. My outer garments were soaking wet; fur cap and hair too. When we reached Laret these wet things began to freeze. When we reached Wolfgang, a mighty blast tore snow from the meadows and whirled it round us, chilling me to the marrow. When we arrived at Davos Dörfli, I was harnessed in solid mail of ice, and my forehead bristled with icicles.'

In the winter of 1887-8 I undertook many short journeys

with the view of inspecting the unusual phenomena of avalanches. The most interesting of these was the last, when I left Davos with one of my daughters for Italy by the routes of Landwasser, Julier, and Maloja. We set off at 6 A.M., under a clear frosty sky, upon April 5. Owing to Föhn-wind and constant traffic the snow-road was broken into deep ruts and holes, which made our sledges leap, jump, bump, buck, lurch, and thud in ways quite indescribable to those who have not experienced the process. The luggage-sledge behind upset three times in the course of the first five miles. The great avalanche at Glarus we passed by means of the gallery which I have described above,¹ and were soon engaged in the dreary gorges of the Züge. This name has been given to the narrow and precipitous ravine through which the Landwasser goes thundering to join the Albula and Rhine, because on either hand, for the distance of about two miles, its steep sides are swept by avalanches. Zug is the local expression for the track followed by an avalanche, and the ravine in question is a continuous series of Züge. I have seen nothing in the Alps which impressed me so strongly with the force—the cruel blind force of nature—as the aspect of the Züge on that April morning. Avalanche upon avalanche had been pouring down into the valley from three thousand feet above. The stream was buried beneath Staub-Lawinen, Schlag-Lawinen, Grund-Lawinen, to the depth of scores of feet. Here and there the torrent burst with clamorous roar from the jaws of one dark icy cavern only to plunge again into the silence and the blackness of another yawning mass of desolation. Millions of tons of snow, of uprooted rocks, and of mangled forests were lying huddled together, left to rot beneath the fretting influence of rain or south winds, slowly losing dignity of outline and substance in a blur of mottled, besmirched, pitted hideousness. Here there is a tunnel in the cliff, festooned with frozen stalactites, and clogged with the débris of ice dislodged by its own weight from the dripping roof. There the walls of marble snow, where excavation has been made in avalanches, rise to a height of twenty feet above our heads. Next comes a horrid Grund-Lawine, filthy, cynical, with its wreck of stones and rubble, gnawed stems, shattered parapets, and snapped telegraph-posts. Over these we had to crawl as well as we could; the horses could just contrive to get across the ridged deluge, climbing and descending, climbing and descending, on narrow tracks

¹ P. 7.

delved by the road-makers. These tracks are encumbered with enormous blocks of limestone and round boulders, which fall independently of avalanches from the scars left by avalanches on the heights above. And always rocks rolling in the ravines with a sullen roar; always, the snow-slips shifting on the cliffs around us; always, from time to time, the sullen clamour of the maddened torrent as it leapt from one black cavern to another. There are several tunnels pierced in the living rock, and just before the mouth of the last of these, a Grund-Lawine had fallen two hours earlier. It had carried away the road and parapets, depositing a sharply-inclined slope of snow and dirty débris in their place. This we clambered over, as well as we could, on foot. The horses, helped by their brawny drivers, had great difficulty in dragging the sledges across its uneven treacherous slope, which extended in a straight line to the stream-bed twenty yards below. The whole ravine left a sad and horrifying impression of mere ruin on the mind—nature-forces spending themselves in waste, acting now as they have acted for past millions of years, blindly clashing together, apparently with no result except destruction, certainly with no regard for man's convenience, and still more certainly with serious imperilment to human life.

I was glad to emerge from the Züge and to gain those larch-woods on the way to Wiesen, from which a distant and glorious prospect may be enjoyed of the pure mountain summits glittering in morning light. To think that those calm tracts of silver snow, so exquisitely moulded into peaks and 'finely-pencilled valleys' above their sombre pine-woods, should be responsible for all the havoc and the horror of the Züge!

I shall not dwell upon the next stages of this day's journey, which were performed in carriages; for the snow had melted on the post-road from Wiesen to Tiefenkasten and half-way up the Julier. The evidences of damage caused by avalanches were interesting, but need not be recorded. It began to snow when we approached the village of Schweiningen. Enormous flakes swirled lazily and heavily through still grey air. As I caught them against the blackness of the pine-woods, they looked like a countless multitude of Apollo butterflies. The flakes were hardly less in size, and had the same clumsy, helpless flight. From this time forward snow fell more or less continuously till the end of our long journey. Just below Mühlen we crossed an avalanche, which had cut its track out of a forest of young pines and larches.

The section through which we passed revealed on both sides a compact mass of stems, sawn through to make the road. There was more of solid wood than snow, and the damage must have been mainly caused by the Lawinen-Dunst.

At Mühlen we had to take an open sledge again. Here, as the day was drawing to its close, I doubted whether it was prudent to fare forward in the whirling snow. But there is fascination in completing journeys once begun; besides, we wished to cross the Julier before the snow could mound us up and stop our going. So we called fresh horses, and went forth into the twilight. The evening slowly dwindled, while we jolted, lunging and lurching along the troughed and deeply-cloven road to Stalla. Imagination quails before those bumps and jumps. They threw the horse upon his knees, ourselves upon our faces in the sledge, and the driver from his stand behind it. At Stalla there was the opportunity again of resting for the night. But the same impulse swayed us now as before at Mühlen. Our spirits rose, while the sleet fell thickly and the wind wailed grimly, at the thought of threading those mysterious snow-ways of the pass in darkness. Onward, then, we drove, silencing the postilion, who more than recommended the wisdom of a halt. Night closed round; and up we travelled for two hours, at a foot's pace, turning corners which we could not see or feel, exploring trackless wastes of drift, with stinging snow-shafts on our faces. The Hospiz was reached at last; and here we had a third chance of suspending our journey and resting for the night. Imagine a hut of rough-hewn stone, crowded with burly carters, swarming out to greet us by the light of one dim lantern! Over the roof of the hovel surged the mounded snow, and curved itself in billowy lines of beauty—like the breasts, I thought, of Amphitrite's nymphs, as Pheidias might have moulded them—above those granite eaves. The carters emerged from a cellar, as it seemed, climbing up six feet of snow by steps cut out to reach the level of the road. As they stood in the doorway, stalwart fellows clad in shaggy serge, like bears, the snow-wreaths curling from the rafters touched their hairy heads. I had no adverse mind to staying there and fraternising with these comrades through a winter's night. Nor did I fear for my daughter's comfort. I knew that she would be well; our beds, though cold, would certainly be dry. Winter on the tops of mountains has this merit, that damp can find no place there. And the hearts of mountaineers, beneath their husk of roughness, are the hearts of gentlemen. But the

impulse to fare forward, the dream-like sense of something to be blindly done, the more practical fear that we might be snowed up for days in this frost-bound 'cave of care,' bade me order out fresh horses. They were ready at my call, for we were travelling extra-post, and the telegraph-wires, though drowned in snow, discharge their messages. I liked the new postilion. I did not fancy the horse which was harnessed to our sledge. He was a tall, lean chestnut; and chestnuts, as I know by experience, are apt to feel impatient if they get embarrassed in deep snow. As the sequel proved, I made a false shot; for this chestnut showed himself up to every trick and turning in the road we had to follow. Another horse was yoked to the luggage-sledge behind us, then left to do as best he could, without a driver—such is the custom on these mountains. He did his best by following the beast in front. I cared little about luggage at that moment; what I wanted was to arrive at Silvaplana safely with my daughter.

The descent from the Hospiz was grimly solemn and impressive. Passing from the friendly light of that one stable-lantern, we now entered the dim obscurity of dreamland—a mist of whirling snow-flakes, driven onward by the wind which grew in violence. It is never wholly dark upon the snow, but the lustreless pallor of the untracked wilderness, fading off on every side into formless haze, and the complete effacement of all objects to which the sight is accustomed in these regions, are peculiarly trying to eyes and nerves. Here and there we could perceive the tops of black stakes and telegraph posts emerging from the undulating drift. Here and there for considerable intervals they were completely hidden. As these posts average thirty feet in height, some conception of the snow depth may be formed. There was also, at times, a faint suggestion of impending crags and masses of black rock on this hand or on that. Like the hulls of vessels seen through fog at sea, they swam into sight and shrank out of it again phantasmally. Nothing more was visible; nothing on which the sense of sight could seize for comfort and support; the track was obliterated, buried in fresh-fallen snow and storm-drift; everything seemed changing, shifting, yielding to the uniformity of elemental treacherousness. The winter road upon the Julier plunges straight downward, cutting across the windings of the summer post-road which lies with all its bridges, barricades, and parapets five fathoms deep below. At one spot, where absolutely nothing appeared to indicate the existence of a track, the postilion

muttered in our ears, 'Now we must trust to the horse; if he misses, it is over with us—*es ist mit uns um.*' The reins were laid upon the chestnut's shoulders, and he succeeded in feeling—scenting out the way. Pausing, sounding at each step with his fore feet, putting his nose down to smell, sometimes hardly stirring, sometimes breaking into a trot for a few seconds, then coming to a sudden halt again, then moving cautiously as though in doubt, he went with interruptions forward. The sledge-bells had been left behind at the Hospiz for fear of avalanches; their tinkling or the crack of a whip suffices in such weather to dislodge a snow-slip. The other horse with the baggage-sledge followed behind, attending eagerly to every movement of his comrade. And so we passed silently, glidingly, mysteriously downward into the gulf of utter gloom, without making the least sound. The only noise we heard was the eldritch shrieking of the wind, and a horrible æolian music from the telegraph wires close at our ears. We could touch these wires with our fingers when they were not buried in snow, and they thrilled with a sharp metallic shudder like the voices of banshees or lost wailing women, uttering shrill threats and curses, murmuring their drowsy runes of doom. Sometimes we ascended avalanches and then there was blank vacancy and utter silence—every object huddled in ruin, and the path smoothed out by softly-curving wreaths. The horse was up to his belly in unwrinkled drifts. Only through changes of movement in the sledge did we know that we were climbing steeply up or plunging perilously down. On the dizzy top of one of these avalanches it happened that the clouds above us broke, and far up in a solitary space of sky, the Great Bear swam into sight for a few moments. This little starlight was enough to reveal the desolation of the place and the yawning chasms on our right and left. I knew by experience how narrow, how high-uplifted, is the thread of traversable pathway in such passages. A false step to this side or to that would plunge us into oceans of soft smothering snow from which in darkness we could not hope to extricate ourselves. Yet the two brave horses kept the track. Ursa Major was swallowed up in mist again. The wind rallied with fierce clutching grasps, while we cautiously descended from the avalanche and resumed what must have been the winter road, although we could not see or feel it. Just then cembras began to show their dark masses on the cliffs, and something more sombre even than the night

loomed far ahead before us. The cembras told me that we were nearing Silvaplana, and the obscurity in front must surely be the bulk of the Bernina group beyond the Engadine. Courage! We shall soon be under shelter! But, even as I said these words, the whirlwind scooped the snow again in blinding drifts around us, and the telegraph-banshees shrieked with redoubled spitefulness: 'Come away, come away to us! Come and be buried as we have been! Come and be damned in the prisons of frost with us! The wind that makes us croon our weird shall wind the snow-wreaths over you!' That was not to be our destiny, however; for, after jolting through another avalanche, the excavated walls of which touched our sledges on each hand, we made a few sharp turns, saw lights ahead, and came lurching into the little street of Silvaplana opposite the hospitable 'Wilde Mann.' We had been driving for fourteen hours over every conceivable kind of road—rough, broken, precipitous, trackless—and we were glad enough to get a late supper and a warm bed. In this account of a night-passage of the Julier, I have not spoken about cold or exposure to weather. Indeed, we did not think about these things, nor did we suffer from them. Of course we were snowed over, and almost throttled sometimes by the wind. But cold is little felt on mountain passes when the air is dry and the traveller wears proper clothing.

The storm howled on all night, but died away before the morning. Long ere the sun had risen on the Engadine, his glorious rays were scattering clouds and silvering mists above the glaciers of Bernina. They fled like smoke, or formed themselves in squadrons, which went slowly rolling down the ridges of the hills before a wakening breeze which blew from Italy. That day's journey was accomplished in brilliant light; and the huge avalanches we had to traverse—eleven of them between Silvaplana and Maloja, not counting minor snow-slips—were as white and glittering as Carrara marble. These were either Staub-Lawinen which had fallen in February, or Schlag-Lawinen brought down by the warm weather of the last week. At Maloja the extent of the winter snow-fall made itself very obvious. Large houses and stables were literally buried; the mass of snow upon their roofs was connected in a long even line with the snow upon the meadows, while deep galleries had been cut out for access to the doors or windows. The sudden drop from Maloja's mountain parapet into an Italian valley is always impressive, To-day it was remarkably

so; for the hanging woods and precipices, along which the road winds by a series of cleverly engineered zigzags, were encumbered with soft curving, beautifully moulded snow—fold over fold; lip stretching down to lip; so heavy, so voluminous, so airily suspended, that they seemed to keep their balance by a miracle. Indeed, in several places, the forest had been cut by avalanches. But the grandest sight was just above Casaccia. On the night of March 27 two huge Schlag-Lawinen fell from different quarters in the neighbourhood of this village; and on the night of the 28th a third descended from the Canaletta-gorge, and stormed around the ruined church of San Gaudenzio. All these were visible as we approached Casaccia; and the last of them had to be traversed at its greatest breadth. It was here that I studied a newly-fallen Schlag-Lawine in its most picturesque form and in a highly romantic position.¹ Travellers by the Maloja will certainly remember the deserted church of San Gaudenzio, and the delicate tracery of its windows, on their right hand coming from the Engadine. It has escaped from total destruction by a miracle. Through a fortunate deflection of the avalanche, the main stream, with its burden of trees and stones, swept past the building. Yet the snow is piled so high around it that a man can step from the level of the avalanche on to its highest wall, while its single door is mounded up.² Rarely have I contemplated anything of beauty more fairy-like and fantastic than this Schlag-Lawine, white and luminous beneath the cheerful sunbeams, curling round the grey ruin, and stretching long firths and pine-plumed pinnacles into the valley!

The winter is over and gone. Among the cities of Italy, upon the lagoons of Venice, the memory of those grey months of snow and storm has melted like a dream of midnight. Meanwhile the same forces which unleashed the avalanches, and sent them thundering down their paths of ruin, have been slowly but surely consuming their frail substance. Warm wind, the *Schneefresser*, and April rains, have made them vanish into dew. Where the Adige sweeps toward the sea at Brondolo, where swollen Brenta licks Bassano's wooden bridge, perhaps we pause to think one moment of our friends, the Staub-Lawine, Schlag-Lawine, Grund-Lawine, Schnee-Rutsch. This then, this flood of water, racing to the ocean, is what they have become!

¹ See above, p. 5.

² See letter from Bergell to *Freier Rhätier*, April 11, 1888.

Returning to the Alps in summer, we look for them well-nigh in vain. Here and there, like the carcase of a whale rotting upon the sea-shore, some mighty but diminished monster may still be seen, with the havoc it has wrought, the splintered pines, rocks, displumed larches, battered alders—strewn around it. Perhaps we cross a desolate high pass, where winter dwells rebellious in unwillingness to quit his hold on earth. The torrent is bridged over there with snow, and heavy masses clog the gullies. On June 8 last year I traversed the Fluela, and had an hour in open sledges at the top. Thus, after nine weeks wandering in paradise, I re-entered my mountain home by the same way as out I went in April.

A dead avalanche upon an upland hill-side is an almost pathetic spectacle. It has furrowed its way through the pine-wood, and grooved a track of desolation in the valley. The stream is choked with its compact incumbency of snow. Birch trees and forlorn fir branches nod upon its broad dusky-white back, bending leafless boughs, or tossing draggled plumes in drear disarray. All round and far below, the meadows smile with flowers and waving grasses. Yet here at least, in the midst of Spring, lies Winter! Then, as the June sun rises day by day with stronger beams, the avalanche decays and trickles into rivulets. You see little flowers thrusting their jewelled heads from the brown fringe of withered sward around its frozen borders. First come the lilac bells of soldanella, and crocuses like white shells on some sea-shore of romance. Each successive day brings a new fringe of blossoms round the retreating snow; and each evening sees them pass away into green grasses. So brief is the bloom-time of the earliest flowers; so active is the life of earth in summer! Then globed ranunculus and pale anemone, geranium and pearl-white lily, gentians with their enamelled cups of peacock-blue, pink primroses, and creamy butterworts, start in rainbow circles from the fresh young sward. Soon, all too soon, the tall grass gains upon these vernal flowers. The mowers with their scythes ascend the Alp, and before July is over, we have to wait for winter, when the avalanche will surely fall again.

A RAMBLER'S REFLECTIONS.

Now that the touring time is spent (though we are well aware that in all parts of the world all the year round we should find some creeping, aggressive Britons), I want to say a few words about the impressions of civilised travel. A rolling stone may gather no 'moss,' but, after all, this is by no means the most precious possession. Some perception of the contrasts, not only between countries, but between successive stages in the ways, use, and condition of a land, cannot be altogether worthless. And, inevitably, the man who ever sits at home cannot reach this at first hand. He may, no doubt, acquaint himself with much from books of description, but there is a receptivity possible only to such as use their own eyes. I do not refer to tropical or polar explorations. I am thinking only of places fairly accessible, and which seem to be familiar to the public through numerous journals, travels, and guide-books. The most vivid and graphic picture only recalls a scene, or leaves the reader to wish that he could see for himself what he has been told by tongue or pen, brush or type. To him the most impressive scenery and people are always printed or framed. And he never sees them even truly represented thus, for the best picture fails to show those details of common life and domestic or wayside movements which generally first attract the notice of the visitor. Either the artist cannot reproduce them, or he has his own blind way of seeing and showing the scenes which surround him, or (which is worst of all) he paints an impossible accompaniment merely because he thinks that the public expects it. Sometimes, of course, he can't help himself, for there is a fringe of interest, small or great, hanging to every natural view which is simply incapable of representation; and the artist must not be blamed because his leaves, waves, and clouds move not, and that thus he always presents nature to us in a silent immovable calm. Thus, though it be in the smallest circles, man must move about to perceive the reality of the world around him. You can't really understand a map or a picture till you have visited the country and seen the place which professes to be represented.

Suffer me, however, to set down a few words about some im-

pressions (they are really incalculable) which even commonplace touring can make on anyone who knows little or nothing of science and art, but uses his eyes, and not only disregards guide-books, but repudiates conventional information. I was started in this train of thought by a run through the 'Black Country,' which, even in its ugliest, flattest, and dirtiest parts, is one of the most suggestive that an Englishman can traverse. Of course, the first thing which ought to be noticed is the intelligence of those human ants which have clustered over the coal, and creep in and out of the holes which have been bored through the crust above it. Time was when the grass and trees it produced were green and clean. Britons (however cold) had no notion of the fuel under their feet. The Roman cinder-heaps found in some parts of the country came from the burning of coal picked off seams which reached the surface of the ground. And though some mines have been worked for centuries, it was not till steam-engines were erected over them (the first was set up about one hundred years ago) that the country came to be blackened. It is the smoke, not the dark fuel, which soils the face of the land. The trunks of the trees, the hay and corn in the fields, and the cottage clothes hanging out to dry in the smutty sunshine, are soiled alike. Well, I suppose it all develops intelligence and progress, especially under the heavier canopies hanging over those laborious towns which, as you whistle past them, show mean crowded suburbs of blackened red brick, and glimpses of an unwashed population. Perhaps it is all right, but what a pleasant-looking country it must have been before Christian civilisation set about disembowelling it and feeding monster factories with its entrails, until civilised man became a slave to the machinery he had created. I know it is very wrong, but I cannot see an iron-hearted, thousand-fingered spinning machine, demanding attention which must not be withheld for a minute, without thinking of Franksteins and the raising of ungrateful devils in general. It was in the Glasgow Exhibition, I believe (but they are all alike, and probably all have shown the same contrasting procedure), that I saw a lop-sided old Welsh handloom in the corner of a huge 'compartment' displaying instruments which knitted, wove and plaited a thousand threads into unerring complicated patterns, with much metallic chatter and smell. The shabby crooked old loom was put there to show off the latest mechanical triumphs, but I could not help feeling a measure of special respect for the homely tackle which obeyed the weaver instead of com-

manding him. In these enlightened days a man does not work a loom—the loom works him. I believe, indeed, that (with unconscious fitness of language) the worker is said to ‘serve’ a machine; and in the service of this he may not stop nor pause. Not so with the simple old Welsh affair which was exhibited to be smiled at, and yet, all the same, recognised and respected the mind as well as the hand of a craftsman. Of course I am hinting at heresies, but they are none the less true. Machinery may ‘save’ some kinds of labour, but it inflicts others. The trunk-like chimneys which make the Black Country a forest of flues, with giant trees of blazing foliage, the oscillating beams which show like lean and monstrous creatures devouring the land, the glare of liquid iron, and the hanging clouds of smoke, all bear witness to ‘progress’ in the slavery of civilisation, as well as to scientific dominion over the bowels of the earth. But what an artificial existence, socially as well as mechanically, does this region suggest! How do the people there amuse themselves? Is their reputed fondness for ‘betting’ an escape from the inevitably accurate and foreseen performance of material operations? Has ‘chance’ a special charm for those who daily watch the certainty with which an engine revolves? Are they driven by smuts and stinks into doings for which they would have small desire if surrounded by the sweetness and light of fields, flowers, and sunshine? On the other hand, while the traditional bucolic or agricultural mind is slow to bend before the urgency of spiritual force, has not many an ardent evangelist found a specially quick response among the souls of the toilworn workers who see and hear nothing but the dust and din of worldly labour? Then, too, how do they live, where do they get their daily bread, what feeds the million hands which toil in the sustenance of manufacturing life? As I passed by and beheld their exertions, they said that more furnaces were being lit at home, more orders coming in from afar. It was nothing to them that English wheat lay rotting in its little fields. The shipper almost smiled to watch how each additional wet week made the business of bringing corn to our shores more sure, and thus put money in his purse. The farmer may lament, but the substitution of the steamship for the waggon makes the merchant rejoice. The ‘cargo,’ not the ‘cartload,’ marks the modern ‘Harvest Home.’ And yet upon how thin a thread does the workers’ daily bread depend! I looked at the small dingy fields, the stacks of blackened corn, hardly saved, and the remnant still

unhoused. I thought of the Naval Manœuvres, the multitude of mouths opening to be filled again and again every day, and all dependent on social and international machinery liable to dislocation in a week. Is this nineteenth century fatness and 'development' a mere bladder at the mercy of a prick?

Then, as we travelled on and saw the fiery flues grow fewer, the green of the meadows begin to show itself through a cleaner air, and the little fields (which bear all the home-grown corn we eat) already passing again under the sedulous never-ending tillage of the year, one thought of the huge harvest-yellow breadths, East and West, in India and America, bringing forth almost of themselves, sure of unbroken sunshine through the crisis of growth, needing (in many instances) no toilsome building of the stack, but lending their ripened ears to the thresher without any intermediate session or waiting in the field. True, some might ask whether the growers there realised that failure to sell was only one degree less unfortunate than inability to buy. But their sale is of abundance, of excess; transatlantic and trans-European farmers would have sufficient corn to eat, however little (in their continent of grain) they might realise this advantage over crowded islanders who would soon come to the end of their stinted crops. Nevertheless, the consideration that Europe must needs be the chief aim of exported 'bread stuffs' for years to come must surely be a weighty factor in forecasting any strife between the Old and New Worlds. Americans, especially Canadians, cannot easily consume what they produce, or at least, since their productions (especially in the North-West) must for a long while be the cereal and fleshly fruit of the earth, their industry must be damped in proportion as transatlantic markets are endangered. Suppose (which God forbid) a war between England and America. A swarm of 'Alabamas' would sail forth to cripple our commerce and stop our income of corn. These reprisals would soon be seen to have a double edge. It is all very well to vex an enemy, but the Yankee farmer would have something to say about cutting off the nose to spite the face.

As I traversed the Black Country (to go back to my first brief) the question came how soon other grassy regions would be bored for the coal beneath them. And then the Canadian future showed itself in another light. Now it is ploughed for wheat and grazed for cattle, but both plough and beast are hitherto as nothing compared with the extent of fertile soil which now brings forth the prairie

grass alone. The first effort of the settler will be to provide carriage, i.e. railways, for the transport of his agricultural produce. His tillage of the surface will no doubt go on for many years, but (all along) busy brains do not forget that beneath a lately realised enormous wheat region in Canada there lies a coal-bed of incalculable worth. This (to take an illustration of the potential underground power which I refer to) has been pierced in several places, and the expectation of the borer has been more than met by rushes of gas (converted by a match into fountains of flame) in the midst of aromatic plains. Elsewhere the sleeping monster of force has laid a black finger outside its coverlet of turf, and professors have gathered around it, saying, 'This is an outcrop of the huge bed of coal which stretches for hundreds of miles underground eastward from the Rocky Mountains.' I myself traversed that region not long ago, and now I can still see an expert returning to our carriage on the Canadian Pacific with a hammer in one hand, and a handkerchief filled with coals which he might almost have taken out of the scuttle in his study at Manchester in the other. He had chipped them off the sleeping giant's finger-nail while the engine was being watered. Here is prospective 'Dominion.' Of old this Black Country of ours at home was innocent of smoke, silent as a forest, and showed only narrow tracks of prehistoric man leading from one spring or cave to another. Now its towns stand upon a crust beneath which its riches (for they are revealed only to be consumed) await devouring fire, its people go down 'quick' into the pit, its face is spotted with pimples of flame, and its once noiseless plains shake day by day and night by night with the uproar of groaning engines and rattling trucks. Thinking of the great Canadian coal-bed, and of the sweet odours now yielded by the prairie grass when crushed under the foot of the passing Indian or settler, I asked myself when will it be seamed and rifled by the miner? When will the black stalks of the factory grow up and defile the deep blue Canadian sky with their stinking smoke? Hitherto, the Redskin has been as ignorant of, and indifferent to, the resources beneath his feet as his ancestor the drift man, or his peer the buffalo. He has been hustled into 'Reserves,' though the white-face is at present able to do little more than roughly 'survey' the country to be 'settled,' and upon which its banished immemorial inhabitants are forbidden to trespass. But when the miner begins his work on the prairie his object will be plainly

realised, and the process he employs already arranged. There will be none of that intermediate and tentative digging which for centuries preceded the erection of a steam-engine at the mouth of a coalpit. Already, as he crosses the North-West plains, the passenger by the Canadian Pacific may notice some tall chimneys, not like lonely palms in the desert proclaiming grateful shade and food, but rather ominous funnels, each with its streamer of smoke, like the 'black flag' of the rover who aims at pillage on the 'main.' Already offshoots are sprouting from the thin solitary creeper of iron road which has pushed its way westward. Some day (I am still looking from my carriage in the English Black Country) this newly opened land may come to be burrowed and scored when that in England has passed into a second childhood of impotence. Perhaps (though he is led to reap the mere surface of his soil first) the Canadian will be hastened to explore its depths in the season which forbids any agricultural work. There will, moreover, be a special fitness in the harvest of heat-giving coal in warm mines while the 'blizzard' is freezing life upon the plains above. Indeed, since the seam lies deep in the North-West, there seems to be no reason why the native should not work the top and bottom of his soil in turn, going below to dig in the winter, and coming up to sow in the spring. An energetic hibernation!

Talking of energy, I suppose there is some truth in the exceptionally aggressive perseverance of the Englishman. This toiling palpitating crowd under the Black Country sky suggests it. Certainly to my prejudiced eye the Englishman moves with quicker step than his cousins across the Atlantic or neighbours in Europe. His trains are the fastest and his steel the sharpest in the world. He is well placed, and yet he does not altogether owe his (present) conspicuous position to the fact that he stands conveniently between the two continents, holding his western harbours open to catch the arrivals from America before they reach the mainland of Europe which lies behind him. There is something in the dogged driving mood (from whatever source it may be inherited) with which he blunders on, unlike that which moves other pale-faced brethren, and no man can fully fathom or define the difference (which he prominently displays) between white and dark skins, whether black brown or red. The curious thing is that, though you can generally 'spot' Englishmen (including Scots and Irish) all over the world, there are, to speak roughly, no two of them alike. No doubt, according to some people, every sheep

in a flock is known individually to the shepherd, and there are probably differences in a brood of yellow chickens perceived alone by the hen. Celestials, too, are no doubt (among themselves) not so much alike one another as they seem to be, though I have sat in a Chinese theatre and wondered how the flat-faced crowd could ever sort itself into pairs and households without confusion of families. I remember once, moreover, while at Trent (a great seminary of the Roman Catholic priesthood) thinking that the hundreds of black-robed students about the streets ought to have been ticketed or tattooed for due division into classes; I have also seen a multitude of Indians on the march, and felt that the similarity of appearance aimed at in the painting of all their noses blue or yellow (according to the fashion of the tribe) was quite needless, since they had all the same high cheekbones, coarse hair, shining eyes, and stealthy tread. I have watched fellahs in Egypt, and noticed how they all had the same square shoulders, long eyes, prominent calves, and chocolate complexion with which we are familiar on painted mummy-cases and illustrated books of Nile scenery; but I have (again speaking roughly) never seen two Englishmen really alike, except they were twins. Thus, perhaps, the successful aggressiveness of their race may in some measure be accounted for by their individuality. The unit rather than the crowd marks national progress and preponderance.

Be this, however, as it may, the toughness, adaptability and expansive power of England were never more shrewdly being tested than they are now. We suffer from the enterprise of the world. A general spread and improvement of intercommunication is apt to leave former methods in the lurch. Fresh paths draw traffic off old ones. There are not a few examples of this beside the displacement of the English harvest waggon by the American corn-ship.

Take another which has already been noticed. Not long ago I was detained at Suez and saw a string of steamships waiting to enter the canal. They had been accumulated within a very little time. A slight obstruction is enough to gather an impatient fleet at either end of the ditch, and it is this waiting crowd which reveals to the least observant tourist one result of a shortened way to the East. As thus: Till lately the shores of the Mediterranean were supplied with distant Oriental goods by way of the Cape. The merchandise was generally first brought to England, and thence carried by English vessels into European ports. Now, of course, these last can be supplied at first hand by

means of the canal. I can't give any statistics of the traffic through it (some day it will perhaps be choked by a judiciously sunk barge-load of stones, when the fleet of steamers built to thread it will be as helpless as salmon on a turnpike road), nor can I precisely say what advantage has been already taken of the short cut by other nations than our own. But it plainly thins the procession of stout ships which follow the long route by the Cape. Who will creep round the whole carcase of Africa when he can step across its neck? Nevertheless, shortened communication or an easier access is not necessarily a blessing. There are two sides to every so-called improvement. The intercourse of peoples is in many respects indeed desirable, but fences have sometimes been found of use, and it is noteworthy that increased facilities of commerce and international companionship are accompanied by search for the speediest method of blowing out a neighbour's brains in broad sunshine, or insidiously sinking a crowded ship by night. It is a 'threadbare' remark (which, however, shows that the remark has 'worn' well), that nation began to 'rise against nation' and to 'learn war' with fresh eagerness directly after the first great 'Exhibition' of 1851, which was intended to kindle a new love of brotherhood and peace.

Perhaps it is time for these iron and glass displays to be stopped. No doubt they afford opportunity for gigantic advertisements, and philanthropists may see in the praise of soap a promising approach to godliness. But watch the sauntering crowd, and see how it enjoys the adjuncts of the Show more than the material instruction which is offered. Look at the 'Switchback' alone. Here is the true triumph of science. In this age of sensationalism it is something to realise a railway accident for twopence. The repeated catastrophe, however innocuous, when your carriage plunges over an embankment has an undying charm; and there is generally a 'hump' in the course of the descent which brings to the helpless passenger a moment of pure delight. If you were to strip an 'Industrial Exhibition' of such sport as this, and banish the 'coloured fountains' (a conspicuously transparent deception), you would find the diminished 'gate-money' put an end to the whole business. Science has small chance against sensationalism. The French business of 1889 has come to be talked of chiefly by reason of its new Tower of Babel, which rises, not from the desire to escape a deluge, but from that which seeks to invite one—of 'entrance' fees and 'season tickets.' But however tired some may be of seeing more and more 'exhibitions'

announced in the papers, the public has not been glutted yet, and the late spread of elementary education bids fair to keep the appetite up. For the demand for these displays is created by cheap literature which tells men of other countries. The exhibition supplements the newspaper. It brings before the visitor parts of the world which he cannot visit. Bits of the mountain are brought to Mahomet. The excursionist who spends his day at an International Show sees at least 'samples' of the nations. However difficult, e.g., it may be for him to judge of a Canadian forest by pine-tree sections two or three feet long, side by side with a 'trophy' of tinned peaches and some corn under a glass case, he may carry away an impression that the country represented is famous for fir-trees, fruits, and wheat. He has read about them, now he sees them, and if he has eyes, they can generally show him a force of young growth; especially in the exhibited specimens of wood which tell of tall trees and wide girths.

This reference to Canada touches the recollection of divers contrasts which the English tourist never perceives with more clearness than when he has freshly returned from across the Atlantic. It is not seen in the difference between the wide corn regions of California or those of the North-West provinces and the little wheatfields at home, for grain is grain all the world over, and, indeed, the American crops are not to be compared for a moment with the English in respect to abundance and excellence of production. The average harvest yield there is thirteen bushels per acre (in some places South, where the land is exhausted, it has dropped to six), while here it is twenty-eight, and on suitable soil, when 'high' farming prevails, occasionally rises to about fifty. At any rate the English corn crop is, per acre, more than double the American. Thus, when I have been called on to exclaim with admiration at a huge district in the West, yellow with ripened ears, I have admitted that it is 'big.' But the land is more abundant than the crop, and the corn on any hundred square yards of the American wheatfield is not to be compared with that on the same area in England.

The contrasts I have referred to are chiefly those in the growth of country buildings, not grain. It is difficult to conceive of any collection of people who seem to take life more slowly than the inhabitants of a small inland town in the Old Country. Its history is lost in the past. Probably Doomsday Book gives it a few lines; in earlier years it was a Roman station; long before that its well, spring, or river ford may have been the resort of prehistoric men, who had

not even got so far in civilisation as to paint themselves. Possibly, as I have already noticed, the old numerous winding roads in the neighbourhood of several country towns, are the widened descendants of irregular paths which led to some cave water or desirable spot in the dim and distant past, before even the 'Bos longifrons' was being herded and milked by our little black-eyed, dark-haired ancestors who peopled Europe, and have left so many of those marks in our own island which modern geologists have found and interpreted.

There are English foci of population, such as small provincial boroughs or large villages, where the grey old church tower or ivy-grown ruin are the records of a mere yesterday compared with the time during which successive generations have lived there. They are these 'sleepy hollows,' these graves of local history, these survivals of long-forgotten relics, which most strike the eye fresh from the new 'cities' which have sprung up like mushrooms in the night here and there throughout the New World. I have photographs before me now of American and Canadian provincial towns, born only two or three years before they were 'taken.' If the camera commanding their main street, town hall, and church had been placed there in position some thirty or forty months ago, no result would have followed beyond the picture of a coarse hay-field, a scrap of prairie. There would not have been a brick post fence or wheelbarrow to break the grassy flatness of the view. Now you can see hotels and tramcars; you find shops where not merely the necessities of life, but artificial flowers, high-heeled boots, and grand pianos can be bought. I believe that in some transatlantic country towns which were not even projected in, say 1885, you could get a greater variety of articles than in some English ones old beyond discovery, almost beyond conjecture.

The chief contrasts are of this sort. Another is seen in English and (in some places) other European 'neatness.' Farming in America is most slovenly, and the surroundings or equipment of what corresponds to a rural village is there often untidy and mean beyond representation. The work, indeed, during summer, is so hard that little room is left for that commentary of home comfort and flowery decoration which so often gives a charm to English farmhouses. The Illinois grower of maize, pigs, and turkeys is too busy to trim a fence, even if he had any other beside an ugly 'snake' one; or to train unproductive creepers. His field of vision is filled with pork and pumpkins. But there is a nicety of outdoor ornamentation, and a finish of gardening care, which is found

conspicuously, if not solely, in England. This provides a notable contrast to the returning traveller.

But, towering above all other differences, unique in its enormous and unrealised proportions, London never fails to impress the tourist with its peculiar place among the cities of the world. There are many presenting far finer groups of buildings; its main thoroughfares, such as Regent Street and Oxford Street, are not to be compared with those in Paris or Philadelphia; but there is a solidity in its pavement, a steady progress in its vehicles, a sense of continuity in the endless succession of its streets, an air of unpretending confidence in its crowds, an unabashed monotonous ugliness in its lines of suburban villas, which is unique. London is the place where incidents and gatherings which would move many a metropolis 'to its centre' are wholly unnoticed except by such as happen to come across them. Even the most popular events, which may attract some hundred thousand people, do not make a sign or ripple in the surface of the great brick and mortar sea which surrounds the City proper. He must be a very big man indeed who can draw direct personal notice in London. Metropolitan news is conveyed, not by conversation or verbal rumour, but by journals. The 'talk of the Clubs' (exalted by some 'Society' papers) is an infinitesimally small fraction of that which engages the metropolis. There is really no 'talk of the town' as distinct from that of the nation. It is sheer size which distinguishes London. Not long ago I stood by the Castle in Edinburgh, and noticed that I could discern men at work in the fields all around me. There were indications of separate outside life. It is so, moreover, in the large transatlantic cities. Down the straight streets of New York you can catch glimpses of white sails on the Hudson or East River; but when you look at London from any square or open space within its borders, there appears no proof that it has any borders at all, or that it ends anywhere. It might cover the whole earth for all you can see.

The English fields, however thick with corn, may look small by the great wheatfields of America, but when it comes to a crop of houses, London leads the ugly crowd in a way which almost obliterates the sense of comparison. Among the reflections of a Rambler, when he ends his tour and drops anchor in its great ocean of brick waves, none is more notable than that he may wander all over the earth and nowhere find such a city gathering. It is like the sand upon the seashore, not merely for multitude, but also for its flatness and incoherence.

DORINDA'S BROTHER.

I.

FIVE boomed in profound and solemn tones from Westminster, five of a November afternoon; and scarcely had the vibrations ceased when there came a gentle tap on the glass of my door, just as though the great bell's waves of sound had penetrated into my eyrie and marked the flight of time in due pulsation there—as you may notice how, in a Scottish loch, the steamer 'Chevalier,' panting down midstream, sends its faint wash far into some little creek of shepherd hut and coal wharf. But no! again the tap, timid and lingering, and I cried, 'Come in!' Now at five the corridor of my chambers is often dark, for often the gas is not yet lit in it, but there is always the jet from the housekeeper's room at the far end to throw an odd oblique glare along the opposite wall, and give the impression of there being somewhere a magic lantern. As the door was not opened, I went and opened it myself, and there, standing in the lighted half of the passage, was a young and pretty woman. We looked at each other for a moment in silence, I in the shadow and she in the light, until at last, coming closer, she asked earnestly, with a slight foreign accent—

'You remember me?'

'Perfectly!' I replied, after the scrutiny I could scarcely help. 'You are poor Arthur Marleigh's sister, Dorinda.'

'Yes,' she answered; 'and I come to ask your help, which I want so much. Shall you mind if I come in?'

Only a few moments ago, tired of leading cases and breaches of contract, I had turned to 'Nathan der Weise,' and gone wandering with the Templar through the palm-groves, munching the ripe dates and scowling on the watching, dogging, faithful Daya; while to Palestine or the Temple, Recha or Dorinda, there was always the same muffled undercurrent of Strand and river noises, and ever and anon the distant penetrating shriek of the railway, the cry of this our century striking into the Crusades. It was strange, too, how Dorinda's German accent seemed in keeping with the talk of Saladin's prisoner, Curd von Stauffen.

Dorinda looked at me gravely. 'And you really remember me?' she asked.

'You, the sister of my dearest friend!' I replied. 'Why, I remember the first time I saw you, in our first vacation.'

'Ah, yes!' said Dorinda, with a ready sigh. 'We had acting that New Year, and you and Arthur were repeating in the dining-room, and Arthur told me in German to go away. *Ach, Gott!* what am I saying? It was I who was wrong for coming. He only said, "Not here, Dorinda; I am at work with my friend," and then he fetched me my knitting, and I sat outside and knitted, and you found me there.'

'You see there is no doubt we know each other,' I answered. 'Please tell me in what way I can be of help to you now, and be quite sure how happy I shall be.'

And then she turned and looked down into the fire.

I moved a chair up for her, and she sat in it quietly and submissively. It was four years at least since I had seen her, and she was a great deal changed. For four or five years I had scarcely thought of her—scarcely thought, I am ashamed to say, even of her mother, who had formerly been so kind to me. Occasionally a stranger passing in the street recalled them, and set me wondering where they were; or some one would ask after them, and I reply that I hadn't seen or heard of them for years. They had left England, and we interchanged no letters, except when once or twice, at Christmas or the New Year, a card would come, directed in the cramped, almost embroidered hand, that in the old days had always meant a dinner, or a dance, or music; and I knew they were in Rome from the forget-me-nots and *sinceri auguri*, or in Nice from the worked pansies and lilies, or in Berlin from the white angels and children's flaxen hair; but never a line or an address, and Dorinda and her mother, and all they once had meant for me, seemed to have gone entirely out of my life. Once I was for ever in and out of the huge smoke-dried London house, but the brilliant son whose English education and University career had kept them here had died, and the old familiar rooms were swept and garnished differently, and strangers looked at me over the blinds when I passed. Yet if, to my shame, I seldom thought of them, seldom seemed to have time for it, it was not seldom I thought of him—of Arthur, whose friendship had been so brief and yet so lasting. Did I not daily use his old inkstand? Was there not always before me the old school leaving-book of Gray's 'Elegy and Letters'?—*hunc librum ab Etonâ discedenti, D. D., Jacobus J. Hornby*—chosen by me out of all the dead

scholar's books and prizes. Sometimes, too, but rarely, I would meet some one who had known him as I had, and we would get together and talk of old times and old sayings, old nights of wine and cards, tea and Shakespeare reading; but such meetings grew yearly more infrequent, and I dare say for two years past his name had never passed my lips. And now, in a flash, those old times had all come back, and here was his sister with me, to want my help so much.

'You did not seem at all surprised to see me,' said Dorinda, suddenly. 'Did you, perhaps, guess I was coming? Did you know I was in London?'

'No,' I replied; 'there was no one to tell me. Is Mrs. Marleigh with you?'

'No, no,' Dorinda answered, 'my mother is in Berlin. I am here alone, with friends. I was obliged to come, and I found where you lived, and I thought I would come and see you alone, and ask you to help me.'

'You did quite right.'

'You will help me, I know,' Dorinda continued earnestly, 'for you loved my brother, and he loved you and will be glad of you to help me.'

'I will do my very utmost,' I replied; 'only tell me everything.'

'It is about money,' she said, dropping her chin as though ashamed—'about money.'

I drew up my chair and sat beside her, prepared to listen.

'Did you ever know,' she asked after a pause, 'our poor Arthur was a gambler?'

I hesitated before I answered. 'I knew,' I said, 'he played cards; I have played with him many times. But to play cards is not to be a gambler.'

'No?' asked Dorinda in astonishment. 'Not to be a gambler?'

'No—any more, surely, than to drink wine is to be a drunkard.'

Dorinda looked at me gravely. 'And if you lose and must pay, is not that to lose money gambling?'

'Not in my opinion, if it be not in excess, any more than, as I say, a little money spent in wine is spent in drunkenness.'

'Then you do not think Arthur was a gambler?'

'No.'

'But perhaps you do not know all he did?'

I was puzzled. What was it Dorinda wanted me to say, and for what purpose?

'You must fancy,' she said, 'I try to prove something against him. It is only that I want you to understand that I, too, understand. Arthur lost a great deal of money at cards and on horses. He had his own money, do you see; but he lost more than he could afford, and he had to borrow. It has never been repaid, and to this moment my mother knows nothing of it. Did you?' she asked suddenly.

I was silent.

'Tell me, please,' said Dorinda simply. And after a pause she added, 'Do not be afraid; you destroy no ideal. It is not as if I was his mother.'

'You must not think the worse,' I answered, 'either of Arthur or of me for following what, at the time we were at the University, was a fashion and nothing more. He played, just as I did, for distraction. He was, as of course you know, very impressionable, very excitable, and those very qualities that helped to make him the scholar he was, often perhaps led him a little further, made him stay a little later at the card-table than he should have done; but, to my knowledge and my definition, he was never a gambler. If he had lived, poor boy, he would have tired of it as I did, for for five years certainly I have never touched a card, nor felt the inclination. You would not think it fair to call me a gambler because for a couple of winters I played more than I ought and lost more than I could afford.'

'You speak kindly,' answered Dorinda, 'but you will not say what I want, or perhaps you do not know, and I must tell you.' She looked down into the fire, knitted her brows, and sighed. 'I am afraid of saying too much,' she said, 'and seeming unnatural, but there is always the truth. Still, all truth is not good or necessary to say, and I will only say a little, just what is really necessary.'

'Need you say anything?' I asked. 'Won't you take it I know all there is to know? Tell me only what it is you want my help for?'

'Very well, sir,' said Dorinda; 'it is best, I think;' and then continued, after a pause, 'You know when my mother and I came down to Cambridge to fetch away the books and papers, you were not there, and we did all ourselves. We packed the clothes and

the books, and tore up the old letters, and had no help; my mother said no one should touch anything. The rooms were exactly as when we came in May, the same flowers in the boxes looking on to the great quadrangle, only all dead; and, just as in the summer, we could hear the chapel organ. We were down only for a day, and at the end of it my mother, who had borne up so wonderfully, quite gave way. It was a great frost and snow, and all the streets seemed to me muffled for our grief. In the evening it was told us a man was waiting. My mother thought it one of the tradesmen only, and asked me to see him. I went out and found waiting in the passage a man named Franks, from a place called St. Margaret's Passage, keeping billiard-rooms there, he said. I ask him his business—Did you know him, sir? she said, 'Mr. Franks, from St. Margaret's Passage; short and broad and little eyes, and his whiskers and beard in a bush under his chin.'

'I remember the man,' I replied—'a rogue; what did he want?'

'He tell a lot of stuff,' continued Dorinda, 'about his sorrow and his admiration for my brother, Mr. Marleigh, but I stop him and said, "Had he a bill? Was it some money?" Yes, he said it was money, but he had no bill. Mr. Marleigh had borrowed money of him, but he had no bill, nothing to prove it, only his word, and——'

'And he was a poor man,' I interrupted, 'and could not afford to lose by it; and yet, if his claim was disputed, rather than cause any trouble, he would give in and never say another word. And of all the University gentlemen he had ever known Mr. Marleigh was his favourite, and the only one for whom he had ever done such a thing or ever would; and it was paltry of him to intrude at such a time of grief, yet being a poor man, with a wife and family——'

'Why,' cried Dorinda, 'that is what he did say!'

'You see,' I answered, 'I know the type, and I'm afraid I know he was successful. You were afraid to trouble your mother more——'

'Ah, yes! My mother looked at me as though she might be afraid of more trouble. "Who was it?" she asked. "A tradesman only," I said; "he is paid and gone away."'

'And in reality he has never been paid, and all these years has been getting money out of you and frightening you! Oh, dear

Miss Dorinda!' I cried, rising hastily, 'why didn't you tell me, or some one you could trust, and get the rogue sent about his business?'

'There was a reason,' answered Dorinda gravely, 'that seemed enough then, though now it seems to me almost silly. And, besides, I did not dare go to my mother and say, "See, your boy owes money, borrowed from a billiard-man for cards and horses and visits to London when he never came near us!"'

'But me?' I cried; 'surely you might have come to me?'

'I was afraid,' Dorinda answered, 'partly because—Oh, I was afraid for many reasons. I could not possibly have come to you. And think, what could you have done?'

'I should at the least have made him prove his debt,' I said. 'I should not have taken his bare word.'

'He had nothing else,' Dorinda answered simply. 'I was bound to take it.'

'And if he was telling you lies, as is only too likely?'

'But if he was telling the truth, as I can have no doubt, for what excuse could we keep him out of his money? If we had refused to pay him I should not have been able to sleep for thinking that, after all, his claim might be just.'

'Well, well,' I said, 'sooner or later you have come to me, and I am very glad, only I wish it had been sooner. And now, of course, you want me to go to this man and put a stop to the blackmailing.'

'Not quite, please,' said Dorinda. 'But more this. You see, lately he has been troubling me—teasing me. His interest has always been paid, but suddenly he demands everything—all the money at once—and I cannot get it. My mother knows nothing of it, and I cannot ask my husband, it would not quite be fair; and, besides, latterly he has been unfortunate—the vineyards have failed, and I am sure he could not afford it. Julius is very good, but——'

'Forgive me interrupting you, but I never knew you were married.'

'Oh yes, since four years already. And I have always paid the interest out of—well, the allowance for my dress, which is more than I want; but I cannot suddenly pay so much. And what I want of you is to see him and ask to let the money be paid off in pieces—twenty-five pounds each four months—until——'

'But how much is it?'

'Hundred and seventy pounds,' Dorinda answered.

'A hundred and seventy pounds! And for that you have taken the man's word only?'

'He had nothing else,' she repeated. 'Was I not bound to take it?'

Dorinda rose and came to me. 'Why do you look like that?' she asked.

'I am trying to remember if I have not heard of this debt before—if I was not told of this money having been borrowed and repaid.'

'But he would never have come to me to be paid twice!' she cried; 'he would never be so wicked!'

'I cannot remember anything whatever about it,' I said, after a pause. 'I can't recall your brother having ever even mentioned the man's name to me.'

'It has shocked you to think he could owe so much money borrowed from a saloon-keeper? Ah, if my mother were to hear of it!'

'That will not be likely,' I replied. 'I will go down to Cambridge to-morrow and investigate the whole affair thoroughly. I shall be back early in the afternoon, and if you will tell me where you are staying I will come on and see you at once.'

'To-morrow afternoon,' Dorinda answered, 'we are going to the theatre. I will send to you where it is; come there and find me and tell me.'

'It is very strange,' I said again, after a pause, 'I cannot remember anything whatever about it; and yet I feel that if I were to try I might.'

'But you cannot think,' Dorinda replied, 'that anyone could be so wicked as to tell such lies about a poor dead man?'

'There are still vampires extant,' I answered; 'and I have come to believe all extremes possible, whether of virtue or vice. The very unlikelihood of it may have made the man successful. At any rate, we shall know all about it in a day or two. Till then, pray do not let it trouble you.'

'I will try,' said Dorinda. '*Lieber Himmel!* What time is that—that great bell?'

'That's Westminster giving the signal to many of the tribe that haunt these dark Strand streets to leave their unhallowed work and limp home scowling from their discoloured, partitioned offices up three pairs of mouldy, broken stairs. I will accompany

you down, if you will permit me, and you can tell me more as we go along. I am curious to know at what rate of percentage you have been paying this particular specimen.'

II.

I CONFESS I had no doubt the money had been borrowed and still was owing. I had no doubt the only result of my journey would be the production of a note of hand, which policy had induced Franks to keep in the background for any male interpolator who might come forward; while for the other sex his bare word, his complete trust in Mr. Marleigh's honour, his sham affection, were much more likely to secure over-payment, honorarium, or *pour-boire* for extra civility and attention than just the mere frigid production of a bill. Excellent wretch, Franks, *qui connaît son monde!* So our poor Arthur had had the money and thrown it by capsful over the windmills, and now by the bend of the back and with straining eye it must be re-collected and painfully returned. Clearly, then, a visit to Cambridge would not do us much good, pleasant as ever is a sight of that ancient seat of learning, with its stream of eternal youth flowing through the courts and quadrangles that grow old so slowly yet so surely.

I need not particularise how it was I had not by me a hundred and seventy pounds of my own. But one thing was clear—the money certainly must be at once repaid; and by Dorinda or by me? Dorinda married, I mused, wearing out her old clothes and sending off her allowance to the billiard-marker of St. Margaret's Passage! And if she has a child or two, and cannot dress them as German mothers love—in great sashes, and high tasselled boots, and Scotch tartans from Berlin! While for me—well, don't we all agree (except the man himself) that one is always the better for a pinch; that many valuable lessons are to be learnt from a scanty wardrobe and a scanty table; that nothing helps the poet's inspiration like the milkmaid bawling for her bill? And Dorinda was married. She spoke of vineyards, so I imagined they had one of those fretwork villas one sees on the Rhine, with blistered green blinds for the summer and a flat in Wiesbaden for the winter; or, perhaps, a castle in the valley of the Lahn, flags flying and donjon, sound and square, as on a Hamburg lottery-ticket.

Now Mr. Anguis was and is a money-lender, and a living instance, or an instance very much alive, to prove that, however

much you may despise, abuse, or condemn people, you cannot deny their occasional usefulness. The usurer has been for so many centuries a cockshy for the Moral (none of whom, so far as I know, have ever ventured to oust him by lending money for nothing, as they very easily might) that any little pebble I might have to sling would be more of a cornelian *la grace* than an instrument of offence. The moralist flays the usurer and the usurer brings an action for libel against the moralist, and both are pleased—the *quid pro quo* of advertisement. Ah! Juvenal must surely have died a rich man if only Fox's Act had obtained in Imperial Rome; a *lex Foxia* would have carried him in a closed litter of ivory and gold on the shoulders of the sturdy Liburnians through the sultry thronged streets, down to shady statued gardens by the Tiber, all his own; or into a courtyard of brazen, ancestral, triumphal chariots, and himself in bronze on a war-horse, *luscus*, closing his left eye as he throws the spear. But Juvenal was poor, and, speaking out his mind without thought of making money by it, had to go into banishment, and so could splash no better men than himself with the wheels of his Victoria, or Hadriania rather, bowling along the Appian Way.

Mr. Anguis, whether his mother sold lemonade in Venice or not, is not ashamed of his name; it is on the door, and if you ring at the bell they don't deny you his presence. I was a mere passer-by—an atom, a worm in want of funds, unknown, un-introduced—but I believe ten minutes did not elapse after my bold ringing of the bell before I was in the actual presence, inhaling the perfume of the gentleman's cigarette. For that I owe my thanks to the journal which, in attacking him, so thoughtfully informed me of his whereabouts. The *descensus Averni* is not difficult, but it seems one of the functions of the modern paragraphist to make it yet more easy. Mr. Anguis sat on a stool—a high stool—one rotund little leg plumped over the other, his thumb-nail running under his moustache, the lilac smoke of the cigarette circling round his simple face. If we had passed each other in the street I should have made the mental note of stock-broker—Cocoa-tree Club—Jermyn Street rooms—baccarat—Maidenhead in the summer—Paris at Easter—and so on. His forehead was lofty, and his head, covered with an innocent white down, was domed; but it was more (if I may say so without offence) the dome of the Turkish bath or the Alhambra than the Temple of Light. He gave me the impression of a little man

quite happy when either making or spending money. As for what he might be at other times, when affairs didn't march as they should, I have no means of knowing. We have never met but the once, hitherto, and for the curious this is exactly what occurred. We bowed to each other with profound courtesy, and sat facing, like patient and doctor.

First round. 'You wish to see me on business, I believe?'

'Yes.'

'Your own business?'

'Yes.'

'Of what kind?'

'In connection with a loan.'

'Yes; and for what amount?'

'A hundred and seventy pounds.'

Thumb-nail runs under moustache; smoke comes out of nostrils, circles round the dome like incense, plays in and out among the baby hair. Mr. Anguis looks so childishly thoughtful, or so thoughtfully childish, I feel inclined to jump up, take his fat little hands, and cry, 'How solemn you are! Come and have a here-we-go-round-the-mulberry-bush!'

Pause, while assistant or secretary comes into the room and seats himself noiselessly at a writing-desk by the other window. I have been waited on by such in white aprons at restaurants of the Gatti-Alessandro-da-Bolla type. He watches me shiftily over the brass-edged top; but I'm in for it and don't care a snap of the fingers who sees me now, on what, I believe, is called the borrowing lay.

Second round. 'What security do you propose to offer?'

'Really, I've scarcely thought of that.'

'Have you any fixed income, or——'

'None whatever.'

'What profession is your father?'

'My parents are dead.'

'Did you succeed to nothing from them?'

'Nothing—or, rather, I've not succeeded in keeping any of it.'

'Have you any profession?'

'Yes, I am a member of the Bar.'

'Not in practice?'

'Well, I've been called two years, and last autumn I'd a brief at quarter-sessions. A man stole some gas-tar, but he had a fit in court——'

'Yes, I see. You are not yet in full practice?'

'No; not yet.'

'And you have no fixed income of any kind?'

'Nothing but what I make. I write a good deal—reviews, and such like—and I'm getting on with a law work on Interrogatories, and——'

'Yes, I see. And what security do you say you propose to offer?'

'Did I mention any? I fancied I said I had not yet thought of any.'

Mr. Anguis's hard fat hands go into his breeches pockets of the old high type that button and, as on the stage, can be slapped. Then says he, slowly, calmly, courteously, 'Not good enough, mister!'

The vulgarity of the phrase put me more at my real ease, the touch of low nature made us kin. It had the instant effect of making me completely comprehend Mr. Anguis, and I came up smiling for the third round.

Third round, in which in more senses than one some slight fibbing took place. 'You see, Mr. Anguis,' I said, 'I had not thought of security, for I imagined the suggestion of it would come from you. You are quite clear, I have no doubt, as to the security you need; now if you will tell it me, I will see it is got.'

'The sum is one hundred and seventy pounds?'

'Yes.'

'Do you wish for it all in money?'

'Yes, please.'

Oh cigars, pictures, sherry, and my youthful novels of London life! Oh Xeres, Havana, Rembrandt, all of Southampton Row!

'A hundred and seventy pounds in money—and for how long? three or six months?'

'Six months.'

'And you offer no security and leave it to me to suggest it?'

'Exactly; though of course I have security, for I make money. Now, why won't my own personal security do? Why can't I mortgage my income to you in advance?'

'Because your income, as I understand it, depends entirely on yourself. You might be ill and unable to work, and then at the end of the six months you'd have a complete answer to me. You would have paid me, only you haven't been well enough to write, do you see?'

'That seems fair?'

Mr. Anguis ruminated, twiddling my card and giving me occasional sharp glances as though he expected to find on me somewhere a suggestion for his demand. As for me, I was looking round the room at the pictures and the great gilt knobby vases, the gaudy brackets and the prickly china, all the monstrous monkey-house bric-à-brac of a witch's drawing-room. Then said Mr. Anguis, in unctuous, semi-magisterial tones, 'I shall require you to give me a bill, backed by a friend, some one substantial, who——'

'Who, in case I can't pay, will at the end of the six months have to pay for me?'

'Yes, or, of course, the bill can be renewed.'

'I understand; and what interest will you require for the loan?'

'Oh, in a little affair of this kind we don't talk of interest. If you were a man of property, or regular fixed income, I would be very glad to let you have two or three thousand pounds at four, four-an-arf, five per cent.; but for a hundred and seventy at six months you would have to pay—*so much*, and on the renewal of the bill—*so much*, in the nature of a bonus, not of interest at all.'

Bonus being the Latin, if I mistake not, for good, and good it certainly *is* for Mr. Anguis; for the sum he mentioned, at six months, amounts, I find by a rapid calculation, to about fifty-two and a half per cent. No wonder Mr. Anguis can smoke so many cigarettes, can look so plump, inhabit such large fine rooms, have such rich and expensive surroundings. Fifty-two and a half per cent.! There is surely the real Shylock blood in him, or at the least his ancestors and the Jew must have been acquainted, transacted business on the same easy terms, trod the same flags of the Rialto.

This stroke of Mr. Anguis, in the neat language of the ring, made me see stars. Would they had been that noble constellation, the prefix of the Three per Cents!

'You will want me to give you the name of a friend?' I said, 'a substantial friend to back your bill.'

'Yes,' replied Mr. Anguis; 'we shall of course make some few inquiries about him, and if they prove as satisfactory as they should, you can have the money at once.'

'And on no other terms?'

'Well, you see you have no other to suggest.'

Mr. Anguis and I look at each other and laugh, quite friendly. Before we part, though we have no settled encounter that can be called a round, we indulge in some little light fancy sparring.

'Mr. Anguis,' I say, 'it occurs to me to ask whether you would not be inclined to make some difference in the amount of your percentage or bonus, if you were told the object for which the money was to be used.'

Mr. Anguis makes a feint of not understanding me.

'I mean that, suppose this money were wanted by me for some charitable object, would you not let me have it on easier terms than if it were wanted for other purposes, perhaps not quite so creditable. Suppose, for example——'

'How could we do that?' returned Mr. Anguis, with a laugh of high amusement. 'How could we ask our clients what they were going to do with their money? They'd say this ain't a blank police-court and you ain't a blank magistrate! What are you thinking of, mister? No, we lend money on terms as easy and safe as we can make them, and when you've got it——'

'Why, I may eat it with bread and butter, I suppose, like a sailor on shore, if I please?'

'Exactly.'

'Well, Mr. Anguis,' I rose and said, 'I think you've treated me very fairly. I have heard you maligned, and you have been, I believe, very often attacked——'

'Sir!' replied Mr. Anguis, loftily, 'hands and quarrels go together, and attacks show me I'm worth attacking, which is what I should like to be sure of every day. A man ain't worth a rap in this world until he begins to have enemies. Why!' he continued, with what I took to be either a first or a last effort at a blush, 'the Christian religion tells you that, hey? Beware when all men speak well of you! No, attacks ain't done me no harm; just t'other way; they've proved my existence to the public and shown the boner-fides of my position by my being able to maintain it. And when one of the papers abuses me for being a money-lender, my only reply is, Go and lend money yourself on easier terms and see what you will make of it. And, to do 'em justice, they none of 'em do! This way, mister.' And Mr. Anguis unlocked a side door and let me out another way; so provided, I imagine, that the bucket coming up empty may never meet the bucket going down full—full, that is, either of hope or gold.

In another hour my arrangements were complete. The substantial friend, substantial as the times go, to whom I confided everything, had agreed to back me, and within twenty-four hours I doubted not I should have the money; so I wrote to Mr Franks to summon him to town to be paid, and with an easy mind went off to the theatre to see Dorinda. It was the French play, and I sat submissive in the pit. There was Dorinda in the stalls with her curls nodding, and there was I in the vast and barren solitude behind her, and in front was Denise with her quiet suffering grace, serpentine in and out of the homilies of Dumas, like a priestess of the Druids in and out of the blocks and angles of Stonehenge. When Madame Hading gave her wild cry of 'Le miserable!' Dorinda moved and turned her head and our eyes met. She gave me a small and solemn bow and turned to the stage again. Whether purposely or not, she lifted her hands to pull her cloak more on to her lap, and I could see she held a packet of papers. I went round into the hall afterwards and met her coming out with her friends. They were complete strangers to me, and Dorinda made no pretence of introduction. 'Will you take these, please?' she said, giving me the packet, 'and look through them. You will understand better than me if it is what I suspect.'

'You suspect?'

'Yes, you will see from the cheque-book. I shall come down to-morrow, and you can tell me then. Good-bye!' And without another word of explanation she went out to the carriage on the arm of an old gentleman, who gave me a glance of suspicion over his shoulder and immediately began to talk very fast. What did she mean? I hurried home with the packet to see. Was Franks a vampire, after all? The idea of it caused me some sense of disappointment. I had so fully made up my mind to discharge the debt myself, had so completely discounted all the trouble and annoyance attached, that to find the debt already paid was as flat as to march over the desert to the relief of Tokar and find the garrison flown, and none but half-starved cats in the shadowless streets. I spread the opened packet under my lamp and set to work. From the street below came the wheeze of a clarionet, breathed dolorously in at a public-house door, and to my fancy, just warm from the theatre, it was as it were a musical heightening of the interest of the situation. Old letters were there, some of them mine (how unformed and characterless the hand seemed!), old playbills, pink amateur programmes with fancy edges, old cards of

Oxford and Cambridge matches, Lillie Bridge sports, betting tickets, grand stand passes, paid bills, and, best of all, a couple of limp attenuated cheque-books with nothing left but the foils. I felt like a digger who has washed a ton of quartz and finds at the bottom of the pan a pennyweight of gold. Foiled!—never was more appropriate melodramatic cry, for among them was the evidence of a couple of cheques paid to Franks, amounting to the actual hundred and seventy pounds, and bearing date just before poor Arthur's last wild rush to Monte Carlo.

I was down at Cambridge by the first train, and by nine was in the bank parlour. I found the authorities sympathetic, but, as they said, powerless. They could not show me a client's pass-book—impossible! And assuredly I should have had to go without it but for the opportune arrival of the bank solicitor, to whom everything was explained, and whose advice was asked. 'Would I sign an indemnity to protect the bank in case of proceedings?' I would sign anything! And in half an hour there was I with the old cheques fluttering under my fingers, and Franks's among them, endorsed in the scoundrel's own unsteady fist. Franks and I went up in the train together. I saw him at the station, with his round shoulders and his deep eyes, and his hands hunched in his pockets. I nearly ran over him at King's Cross as I rattled off down to the Strand to prepare for Dorinda. It would have been a deep disappointment to me if I had hurt him; fortunately he drew back in time.

III.

It was still early in the afternoon when I reached my rooms, and there was still an hour before either Franks or Dorinda were to be with me. But I had scarcely read and answered my letters when I heard the heavy tread in the corridor I felt sure belonged to the proprietor of the rooms in St. Margaret's Passage. If it were, what was I to do with him? for it was part of my plan to play the final scene *à trois*, and have all villainies exposed and the tag spoken in the presence of the lady chiefly injured, Dorinda. He knocked and I called him in, and in response to my invitation he took a chair. I told him he was before his time, and I must trouble him to wait, but that, considering the height at which I lived, I would not turn him out again to descend and walk about till I was ready. Words or breath failed the billiard-

marker in which to express his gratitude, and he sat still and b'ew off steam like a vessel that has entered port and completed her voyage.

It is written that Charles II., that inveterate playgoer, once expressed his surprise at the limitations of the stage, which appeared only to admit of black-browed and black-haired villany. 'Odds fish!' cried he, or something similar, 'are only the black men rogues? Are there no light-haired villains among our faithful people?' And in proof the King might have pointed to Franks, for, far from being black, his hair was auburn, and the beard and whiskers that met under his chin, as Dorinda said, 'in a bush,' were to the poll what the autumn woods are to the coppices in spring; and his cheeks had certain fresh ridges of colour in them, very pleasant and healthful to see. Success, I believe, of any kind brings a certain health with it, and the full employment of the spirit, whether for good or ill, serves to flush the system. 'I was right,' Franks was saying to himself, though perhaps not quite in these words. 'I was right! this is the world—a roped space where the cunningest and strongest win. Only the very cunning and strong could manage to get paid twice!' And then he gave a sidelong look at me. 'If this young fool only knew!' continuing with a chuckle, 'What does he manage to make of the world, I wonder? A green place to tell the truth in? O Youth! O Innocence!—and he's living in an attic, and I'm a-going to be paid twice!' And there was I addressing a letter, and the clock on the mantelpiece ticking round to retribution.

'You must remember many of those men, Mr. Franks,' I said at last, seeing his eyes fixed on my photographs of college groups, 'by sight, at any rate.'

Mr. Franks became deferential immediately, and reined his exulting soul to subservience.

'Pretty well, sir, yes, sir,' he said aloud, getting out of his low chair, 'though they weren't much of a billiard-playin' set, more of a ridin', card-playin', club-dinin'. Nor didn't ever 'ave the honour of seein' you, sir, in my little place; remember you very well though, sir; great friend of Mr. Marleigh's, and——'

'By the way, Franks,' said I, 'hadn't you another establishment over at St. Hunn's, the "White Bear"?''

'Yes, sir, yes,' Franks replied. 'Got it still, sir, and do pretty well with it.'

'And those two pretty girls I remember there, weren't they your daughters?'

'Yes, sir, Maude and Hannie—pretty girls, and good girls, too, sir, though I'm their father.'

'Nothing astonishing in that, Mr. Franks,' said I, politely. 'Pretty girls and good girls are just what I should expect from a man who has behaved so well as you have in this painful affair.'

'Not my way to do hotherwise,' Franks replied pleasantly. 'I've had dealings with University gentlemen for a good long time now, sir, and I don't think there's one of 'em can complain of 'arshness from me. Take your time, sir, I always say; take your time, I can wait.'

'And everything comes to him who knows how to wait, Mr. Franks,' said I.

'Exactly, sir!' said Mr. Franks.

'Even retribution!' said I to myself.

'Even down to getting paid twice!' said Mr. Franks to himself.

'I suppose your girls are married by now, Franks, eh?' I resumed, 'and well married—parsons' wives, or solicitors', or——'

'Maude is gone from us,' said Franks gravely; 'married a Newmarket gent and lives in France. I sor'er last Grarn Preex in a b'rourke at the course. She put me on to a good thing and I won a bit over it. But Hannie 'elps me still at the "Bear." She was treated infernal bad, she was—infernal bad—by a Caius' man; a man, sir, I beyaved like a father to.'

'Did he jilt the rose of St. Hunn's, the scoundrel?'

'Jilt ain't the word, sir,' said Franks vindictively; 'he was to take his degree in medicine, and be married immediate, and he's never done one nor t'other. If I could get 'old of his year I'd medicine him! He's gone straight out to Canada, and the last I 'eard of him he was in trouble at the hotel for takin' orf the office key in brown soap.'

'Well,' I remarked, 'perhaps he'll turn out a successful scoundrel in railway shares, or debenture bonds, or deferred stock, or something of that kind, and come back to the old country with money; and then you'll be able to go at him in the Queen's Bench Division for breach of promise. All I ask is, you give me the brief. I should be grand on an occasion of that kind.'

'Oh, we did that a bit before he left,' grumbled Franks. 'Father was a magistrate——'

And then I heard steps and a rustle in my passage which I knew signalled Dorinda's arrival.

'Now, Mr. Franks,' I said, rising, 'we shall soon have finished your business, I hope, and be able to let you go, with many apologies for keeping you so long. Here is Mrs. Von Maunn, I expect.'

Then I opened the door, to find Dorinda outside, accompanied by the old gentleman on whose arm she left the theatre the afternoon before. She introduced me at once, rather nervously, saying rapidly in German, 'He insisted on coming; he said a third person was always best. He is very tiresome, but he means to be kind. Please don't be offended with him!' and then passed quickly into the room, as though anxious to find herself face to face with Franks. The old gentleman and I bowed solemnly to each other. I set him down as a Major-General, retired, with a touch of the Young Men's Christian Association in him—one of those bland and vague old men you find presiding over slides of Palestine, perfectly enraptured with themselves and the entertainment they are providing. 'Oh, the kind old imbecile!' I said to myself, 'he has come to protect Dorinda. He knows how many unprincipled people there are in the world, and he is determined she shall not be imposed on. He has read of rascals in novels, and I dare say has got a Fleet Street policeman concealed in the wood closet under the stairs.' Directly he found himself inside he began to talk, to impose his personality on us. 'This will never do,' I reflected; 'we shall have Franks frightened and stubborn if we let him run on;' so I lured him into a chair by the window, gave him a cup of tea, and, plainly showing him he had nothing whatever to do with the proceedings, opened the ball.

'This is Mrs. Von Maunn, Franks,' I began, 'Mr. Arthur Marleigh's sister, and this gentleman is her friend, who has been good enough——'

'I have known Mrs. Von Maunn——' the old gentleman struck in.

'Forgive me,' I interrupted, 'Mr. Franks here has a train to catch for Cambridge, and we have no time to lose.'

In another moment he would have been on his legs and introduced the subject of the lecture in a few appropriate words; as it was, he threw open his frock-coat, looked injured, and was silent. Dorinda sat on the sofa, and kept her eyes fixed on Franks's flrid countenance.

'Now, Franks,' I resumed, 'we want, of course, to have everything perfectly clear before you are finally paid. As far as I understand, you appear to have behaved extremely well in never pressing this debt unpleasantly, and we are naturally anxious not to cause you any further delay.'

Franks bowed with the air of a man who has long been doubted, but who knows himself to be a good fellow. I paused for one moment to consider. I did not want to talk too much, and yet I was in no hurry to reach the *dénoûment*. The old gentleman would have said something, but Dorinda hushed him.

'Just let me have all the facts clear,' I said. 'The late Mr. Marleigh borrowed a hundred and seventy pounds of you?'

'Yes, sir, he did.'

'And that money has never been repaid?'

'Never, sir.'

'That may perhaps seem rather a strange question, Franks,' I said, 'but you must remember how completely we are in your hands. You must acknowledge there is nothing whatever to prevent this money from having been immediately repaid, without our knowing anything whatever about it; for, of course, in a transaction of that kind there would be no means of tracing it.'

Franks would have sworn by the most sacred of his oaths, by the altars of Samothrace, if I would have let him, but I thought it kindest, after all, not to permit him to heap more perjury upon his soul; and, besides, I was beginning to feel a dull heavy anger rise in me, and a sickening of the man and his vampirish villany, that urged me to have done with him at once, and send him out into the night.

'Then nothing remains but to pay you,' I said, 'and get you to sign a receipt.'

Franks unbuttoned his coat, and the old gentleman rose.

'I must protest,' he began, 'as Mrs. Von Maunn's friend, and indeed the friend——'

'But I hope that I, too,' I rejoined, 'may be so considered. What is it, as Mrs. Von Maunn's friend, you have to object to, that I may be supposed to find unobjectionable?'

'The payment of so large a sum without due and proper inquiry,' said the old gentleman, and straightway launched on a long and dangerous ramble tending towards the discovered cheque-book, of which Dorinda appeared to have told him something,

which would in another moment have sprung our mine, though with the effect rather of blowing us up than Franks!—when, with a rapid glance at him, calculation of his age, tastes, chances of memory, I shot at him one of the cant thieves' phrases from the old Adelphi 'Jack Shepherd,' one that Blueskin uses in moments of danger to warn his accomplice. French, I dare say, would have done as well, but French perhaps he would have answered, and frightened Franks; at any rate, the notion flashed on me, and before I had time to think the words were spoken, and, what is better, understood. The old gentleman stopped short, stammered, and then looked amused and pleased. His eye lit up, and I could see in it reflections of Strand suppers and cider cellars and the Piccadilly Saloon. He was young again, and sitting in the old Adelphi pit, with his cheek against the spikes, and I believe, with a little encouragement, would have given us 'Nix, my dolly pals, fake away!' The rest was simplicity itself. Franks sat at the table, squared his elbows, wrote out a receipt. I hovered over him, dictating, and drew meantime from my breast pocket the cheque-book and the cheques, which I showed to my audience in pantomime. The old gentleman's eyes filled with the water of laughter, and he turned away to the window. Dorinda looked pale and frightened. To the old gentleman it was high amusement to see a scamp Cæsar jerked out of a triumphal car, but to her it was pain to think that anyone could be so bad, could so trifle with the memory of her lost brother.

'Good! Mr. Franks,' said I, taking the receipt, 'we are much obliged to you; and now, sir, what about these?' and I pushed the evidence of his guilt under his eyes. 'Explain, for, upon my soul, we don't understand them at all!'

I could see Mr. Franks's left cheek, and it was really an interesting study to watch how the healthful ridges of colour flickered, faltered, and finally quite went out. Then he got up and began to curse, and to swear his complete innocence, but I shook him by the collar to silence.

'You wretch!' I cried; 'have you never heard of scoundrels struck blind at such a time? Go, before you get kicked down the eighty-seven stairs that lead to King's Bench Walk!'

Something more I was adding as to the punishment for his past imposture, when Franks, without waiting to fling us the 'Curse ye all!' of baffled villany, shuffled to the door pale and muttering, clattered downstairs like a boy getting out of a theatre

on fire, and the next moment we saw his round shoulders tramping up past the library.

The old gentleman was in ecstasies, and Dorinda was in tears.

'I can't be grateful enough to you,' he said, 'for stopping my stoopid old mouth. And you said it quite in the Keeley manner, that's the astonishing thing! Why, it isn't possible you ever saw the piece?'

Dorinda shook my hand, and said something inarticulate in German.

'Sir,' the old gentleman continued, 'I'm a member of Meason, Welsby, & Archibald, of New Square—I dare say, as a member of the Bar, you will have heard of us—and the first brief that I judge to be in your style comes over to your chambers. By the way, we have, I remember, a trifling theatrical dispute that I believe will come into court, and where you'll be the very man with Mr. Barkley's lead. Bless me! you said it in the exact Keeley manner, and I'm much obliged to you.'

In the summer, if all be well, I mean to go over to Heisterbach and see Dorinda. I remember the place well, for I spent my first vacation close by, at the foot of the Drachenfels, and often rode up through the vineyards to the ruined Abbey. I recall lying there one day with Arthur among the soft uneven hillocks of the dead nuns with their half-buried headstones. He stretched himself out and folded his hands like the Templar effigies of stone. 'P. M. S.!' he cried. '*Piæ Memorie Sacrum*, slain at the siege of Long Acre, fighting against the infidel card-makers of the locality. *Ora pro me!*'

I believe I ought not to close this writing without some few lofty remarks touching Mr. Anguis and his calling; in fact, I know I ought not. But it's not easy, for you see Mr. Anguis was likely to have been of immense use to me, and I should be an ungrateful dog to abuse him. As to the percentage or bonus he proposed to charge, it is a fact that scarcely anybody likes lending money (if you doubt that, go and try, not your best, but your next best friend, and watch his harassed and melancholy expression at the suggestion), and I really don't see why for doing so disagreeable a thing one should not be permitted to make a heavy charge, even to the extent of fifty-two and a half per cent., if one can get it. Are doctors moderate over difficult, or dangerous, or unpleasant operations? Are solicitors, over unpleasant pieces of

business? Don't the military expect something more than their pay for running the gauntlet of fever and bullet? and (not to ask too many unanswerable questions) where, I respectfully ask, do you find a class more persistent than the clergy, if they think there's anything to be got out of you? Shoring up the spire, putting on a new roof, fixing a west window, reseating the nave. The plain truth is, we have the old robber instinct in us still of Angle and Jute; and I am told, and believe, that there's hardly a shop in London that hasn't a scale of prices in proportion to what they think you can pay; so that it makes a vast difference whether you ride, drive, or walk to the shop door and, above all, how your boots and hat shine. Fifty-two and a half per cent. is nothing uncommon at a linendraper's, a chemist's, or a tailor's. Why, then, attack a moneylender for playing only the same game as his brother tradesmen?

Not that I desire Mr. Anguis to marry a relative of mine; nor would I subscribe to have his portrait painted, nor am I in any way interested in his affairs; but I love fair play, and, upon my word, I don't suppose he's guilty of any practices much sharper than the rest, who, if they don't supply us with money (though many of them will do even that), yet supply us with clothes, or medicine, or wine, or boots, at prices equally outrageous. So *vivat Anguis in annos percentum!* and *à bas la Tartuferie!*

DESERT SANDS.

If deserts *have* a fault (which their present biographer is far from admitting), that fault may doubtless be found in the fact that their scenery as a rule tends to be just a trifle monotonous. Though fine in themselves, they lack variety. To be sure, very few of the deserts of real life possess that absolute flatness, sandiness and sameness, which characterises the familiar desert of the poet and of the annual exhibitions—a desert all level yellow expanse, most bilious in its colouring, and relieved by but four allowable academy properties, a palm-tree, a camel, a sphinx, and a pyramid. For foreground, throw in a sheikh in appropriate drapery; for background, a sky-line and a bleaching skeleton; stir and mix, and your picture is finished. Most practical deserts one comes across in travelling, however, are a great deal less simple and theatrical than that; rock preponderates over sand in their composition, and inequalities of surface are often the rule rather than the exception. There is reason to believe, indeed, that the artistic conception of the common or Burlington House desert has been unduly influenced for evil by the accessibility and the poetic adjuncts of the Egyptian sand-waste, which, being situated in a great alluvial river valley is really flat, and being the most familiar, has therefore distorted to its own shape the mental picture of all its kind elsewhere. But most deserts of actual nature are not all flat, nor all sandy; they present a considerable diversity and variety of surface, and their rocks are often unpleasantly obtrusive to the tender feet of the pedestrian traveller.

A desert, in fact, is only a place where the weather is always and uniformly fine. The sand is there merely as what the logicians call, in their cheerful way, 'a separable accident'; the essential of a desert, as such, is the absence of vegetation, due to drought. The barometer in those happy, too happy, regions, always stands at Set Fair. At least, it would, if barometers commonly grew in the desert, where, however, in the present condition of science, they are rarely found. It is this dryness of the air, and this alone, that makes a desert; all the rest, like the camels, the sphinx, the skeleton, and the pyramid, is only thrown in to complete the picture.

Now the first question that occurs to the inquiring mind—which is but a graceful periphrasis for the present writer—when it comes to examine in detail the peculiarities of deserts is just this: Why are there places on the earth's surface on which rain never falls? What makes it so uncommonly dry in Sahara when it's so unpleasantly wet and so unnecessarily foggy in this realm of England? And the obvious answer is, of course, that deserts exist only in those parts of the world where the run of mountain ranges, prevalent winds, and ocean currents conspire to render the average rainfall as small as possible. But strangely enough, there is a large irregular belt of the great eastern continent where these peculiar conditions occur in an almost unbroken line for thousands of miles together, from the west coast of Africa to the borders of China; and it is in this belt that all the best known deserts of the world are actually situated. In one place it is the Atlas and the Kong mountains (now don't pretend, as David Copperfield's aunt would have said, you don't know the Kong mountains); at another place it is the Arabian coast range, Lebanon, and the Beluchi hills; at a third, it is the Himalayas and the Chinese heights that intercept and precipitate all the moisture from the clouds. But from whatever variety of local causes it may arise, the fact still remains the same, that all the great deserts run in this long, almost unbroken series, beginning with the greater and the smaller Sahara, continuing in the Libyan and Egyptian desert, spreading on through the larger part of Arabia, reappearing to the north as the Syrian desert, and to the east as the desert of Rajputana (the Great Indian Desert of the Anglo-Indian mind), while further east again the long line terminates in the desert of Gobi on the Chinese frontier.

In other parts of the world, deserts are less frequent. The peculiar combination of circumstances which goes to produce them does not elsewhere occur over any vast area, on so large a scale. Still, there is one region in western America where the necessary conditions are found to perfection. The high snow-clad peaks of the Rocky Mountains on the one side check and condense all the moisture that comes from the Atlantic; the Sierra Nevada and the Wahsatch range on the other, running parallel with them to the west, check and condense all the moisture that comes from the Pacific coast. In between these two great lines lies the dry and almost rainless district known to the ambitious western mind as the Great American Desert, and enclosing in its midst

that slowly evaporating inland sea, the Great Salt Lake, a last relic of some extinct chain of mighty waters once comparable to Superior, Erie, and Ontario. In Mexico, again, where the twin ranges draw closer together, desert conditions once more supervene. But it is in central Australia that the causes which lead to the desert state are, perhaps, on the whole, best exemplified. There, ranges of high mountains extend almost all round the coasts, and so completely intercept the rainfall which ought to fertilise the great central plain that the rivers are almost all short and local, and one thirsty waste spreads for miles and miles together over the whole unexplored interior of the continent.

But why are deserts rocky and sandy? Why aren't they covered, like the rest of the world, with earth, soil, mould, or dust? One can see plainly enough why there should be little or no vegetation where no rain falls, but one can't see quite so easily why there should be only sand and rock instead of arid clay-field.

Well, the answer is that without vegetation there is no such thing as soil on earth anywhere. The top layer of the land in all ordinary and well-behaved countries is composed entirely of vegetable mould, the decaying remains of innumerable generations of weeds and grasses. Earth to earth is the rule of nature. Soil, in fact, consists entirely of dead leaves. And where there are no leaves to die and decay, there can be no mould or soil to speak of. Darwin showed, indeed, in his last great book, that we owe the whole earthy covering of our hills and plains almost entirely to the perennial exertions of that friend of the farmers, the harmless necessary earthworm. Year after year the silent worker is busy every night pulling down leaves through his tunnelled burrow into his underground nest, and there converting them by means of his castings into the black mould which produces, in the end, for lordly man all his cultivable fields and pasture-lands and meadows. Where there are no leaves and no earth-worms, therefore, there can be no soil; and under those circumstances we get what we familiarly know as a desert.

The normal course of events where new land rises above the sea is something like this, as oceanic isles have sufficiently demonstrated. The rock when it first emerges from the water rises bare and rugged like a sea-cliff; no living thing, animal or vegetable, is harboured anywhere on its naked surface. In time, however, as rain falls upon its jutting peaks and barren pinnacles,

disintegration sets in, or to speak plainer English, the rock crumbles; and soon streams wash down tiny deposits of sand and mud thus produced into the valleys and hollows of the upheaved area. At the same time lichens begin to spring in yellow patches upon the bare face of the rock, and feathery ferns, whose spores have been wafted by the wind, or carried by the waves, or borne on the feet of unconscious birds, sprout here and there from the clefts and crannies. These, as they die and decay, in turn form a thin layer of vegetable mould, the first beginning of a local soil, in which the trusty earth-worm (imported in the egg on driftwood or floating weeds) straightway sets to work to burrow, and which he rapidly increases by his constant labour. On the soil thus deposited, flowering plants and trees can soon root themselves, as fast as seeds, nuts or fruits are wafted to the island by various accidents from surrounding countries. The new land thrown up by the great eruption of Krakatoa has in this way already clothed itself from head to foot with a luxuriant sheet of ferns, mosses, and other vegetation.

First soil, then plant and animal life, are thus in the last resort wholly dependent for their existence on the amount of rainfall. But in deserts, where rain seldom or never falls (except by accident) the first term in this series is altogether wanting. There can be no rivers, brooks or streams to wash down beds of alluvial deposit from the mountains to the valleys. Denudation (the term, though rather awful, is not an improper one) must therefore take a different turn. Practically speaking, there is no water action; the work is all done by sun and wind. Under these circumstances, the rocks crumble away very slowly by mere exposure into small fragments, which the wind knocks off and blows about the surface, forming sand or dust of them in all convenient hollows. The frequent currents, produced by the heated air that lies upon the basking layer of sand, continually keep the surface agitated, and so blow about the sand and grind one piece against the other till it becomes ever finer and finer. Thus for the most part the hollows or valleys of deserts are filled by plains of bare sand, while their higher portions consist rather of barren rocky mountains or table-land.

The effect upon whatever animal or vegetable life can manage here and there to survive under such circumstances is very peculiar. Deserts are the most exacting of all known environments, and they compel their inhabitants with profound imperiousness to

knuckle under to their prejudices and preconceptions in ten thousand particulars.

To begin with, all the smaller denizens of the desert—whether butterflies, beetles, birds, or lizards—must be quite uniformly isabelline or sand-coloured. This universal determination of the desert-haunting creatures to fall in with the fashion and to harmonise with their surroundings adds considerably to the painfully monotonous effect of desert scenery. A green plant, a blue butterfly, a red and yellow bird, a black or bronze-coloured beetle or lizard would improve the artistic aspect of the desert not a little. But no; the animals will hear nothing of such gaudy hues; with Quaker uniformity they will clothe themselves in dove-colour; they will all wear a sandy pepper-and-salt with as great unanimity as the ladies of the Court (on receipt of orders) wear Court mourning for the late lamented King of the Tongataboo Islands.

In reality, this universal sombre tint of desert animals is a beautiful example of the imperious working of our modern *Deus ex machinâ*, natural selection. The more uniform in hue is the environment of any particular region, the more uniform in hue must be all its inhabitants. In the arctic snows, for example, we find this principle pushed to its furthest logical conclusion. There, everything is and must be white—hares, foxes, and ptarmigans alike; and the reason is obvious—there can be no exception. Any brown or black or reddish animal who ventured north would at once render himself unpleasantly conspicuous in the midst of the uniform arctic whiteness. If he were a brown hare, for example, the foxes and bears and birds of prey of the district would spot him at once on the white fields, and pounce down upon him forthwith on his first appearance. That hare would leave no similar descendants to continue the race of brown hares in arctic regions after him. Or, suppose, on the other hand, it were a brown fox who invaded the domain of eternal snow. All the hares and ptarmigans of his new district would behold him coming from afar and keep well out of his way, while he, poor creature, would never be able to spot them at all among the white snow-fields. He would starve for want of prey, at the very time when the white fox, his neighbour, was stealing unperceived with stealthy tread upon the hares and ptarmigans. In this way, from generation to generation of arctic animals, the blacker or browner have been constantly weeded out, and the

greyer and whiter have been constantly encouraged, till now all arctic animals alike are as spotlessly snowy as the snow around them.

In the desert much the same causes operate, in a slightly different way, in favour of a general greyiness or brownness as against pronounced shades of black, white, red, green, or yellow. Desert animals, like intense South Kensington, go in only for neutral tints. In proportion as each individual approaches in hue to the sand about it will it succeed in life in avoiding its enemies or in creeping upon its prey, according to circumstances. In proportion as it presents a strikingly vivid or distinct appearance among the surrounding sand, will it make itself a sure mark for its watchful foes, if it happen to be an unprotected skulker, or will it be seen beforehand and avoided by its prey, if it happen to be a predatory hunting or insect-eating beast. Hence on the sandy desert all species alike are uniformly sand-coloured. Spotty lizards bask on spotty sands, keeping a sharp look-out for spotty butterflies and spotty beetles, only to be themselves spotted and devoured in turn by equally spotty birds, or snakes, or tortoises. All nature seems to have gone into half-mourning together, or, converted by a passing Puritan missionary, to have clad itself incontinently in grey and fawn-colour.

Even the larger beasts that haunt the desert take their tone not a little from their sandy surroundings. You have only to compare the desert-haunting lion with the other great cats to see at once the reason for his peculiar uniform. The tigers and other tropical jungle-cats have their coats arranged in vertical stripes of black and yellow, which, though you would hardly believe it unless you saw them in their native nullahs (good word 'nullah,' gives a convincing Indian tone to a narrative of adventure), harmonise marvellously with the lights and shades of the bamboos and cane-breaks through whose depths the tiger moves so noiselessly.

Looking into the gloom of a tangled jungle, it is almost impossible to pick out the beast from the yellow stems and dark shadows in which it hides, save by the baleful gleam of those wicked eyes, catching the light for one second as they turn wistfully and bloodthirstily towards the approaching stranger. The jaguar, oncelot, leopard, and other tree-cats, on the other hand, are dappled or spotted—a type of coloration which exactly harmonises with the light and shade of the round sun-spots seen

through the foliage of a tropical forest. They, too, are almost indistinguishable from the trees overhead as they creep along cautiously on the trunks and branches. But spots or stripes would at once betray the crouching lion among the bare rocks or desert sands; and therefore the lion is approximately sand-coloured. Seen in a cage at the Zoo, the British lion is a very conspicuous animal indeed; but spread at full length on a sandy patch or among bare yellow rocks under the Saharan sun, you may walk into his mouth before you are even aware of his august existence.

The three other great desert beasts of Asia or Africa—the ostrich, the giraffe, and the camel—are less protectively coloured, for various reasons. Giraffes and ostriches go in herds; they trust for safety mainly to their swiftness of foot, and, when driven to bay, like most gregarious animals they make common cause against the ill-advised intruder. In such cases it is often well, for the sake of stragglers, that the herd should be readily distinguished at a distance; and it is to ensure this advantage, I believe, that giraffes have acquired their strongly-marked spots, as zebras have acquired their distinctive stripes, and hyænas their similarly banded or dappled coats. One must always remember that disguise may be carried a trifle too far, and that recognisability in the parents often gives the young and giddy a point in their favour. For example, it seems certain that the general grey-brown tint of European rabbits serves to render them indistinguishable in a field of bracken, stubble, or dry grass. How hard it is, either for man or hawk, to pick out rabbits so long as they sit still, in an English meadow! But as soon as they begin to run towards their burrows the white patch by their tails inevitably betrays them; and this betrayal seems at first sight like a failure of adaptation. Certainly many a rabbit must be spotted and shot, or killed by birds of prey, solely on account of that tell-tale white patch as he makes for his shelter. Nevertheless, when we come to look closer, we can see, as Mr. Wallace acutely suggests, that the tell-tale patch has its function also. On the first alarm the parent rabbits take to their heels at once, and run at any untoward sight or sound towards the safety of the burrow. The white patch and the hoisted tail act as a danger-signal to the little bunnies, and direct them which way to escape the threatened misfortune. The young ones take the hint at once and follow their leader. Thus what may be sometimes a dis-

advantage to the individual animal becomes in the long run of incalculable benefit to the entire community.

It is interesting to note, too, how much alike in build and gait are these three thoroughbred desert roamers, the giraffe, the ostrich, and the camel or dromedary. In their long legs, their stalking march, their tall necks, and their ungainly appearance they all betoken their common adaptation to the needs and demands of a special environment. Since food is scarce and shelter rare, they have to run about much over large spaces in search of a livelihood or to escape their enemies. Then the burning nature of the sand as well as the need for speed compels them to have long legs, which in turn necessitate equally long necks, if they are to reach the ground or the trees overhead for food and drink. Their feet have to be soft and padded to enable them to run over the sand with ease; and hard horny patches must protect their knees and all other portions of the body liable to touch the sweltering surface when they lie down to rest themselves. Finally, they can all endure thirst for long periods together; and the camel, the most inveterate desert-haunter of the trio, is even provided with a special stomach to take in water for several days at a stretch, besides having a peculiarly tough skin in which perspiration is reduced to a minimum. He carries his own water-supply internally, and wastes as little of it by the way as possible.

What the camel is among animals that is the cactus among plants—the most confirmed and specialised of desert-haunting organisms. It has been wholly developed in, by, and for the desert. I don't mean merely to say that cactuses resemble camels because they are clumsy, ungainly, awkward, and paradoxical; that would be a point of view almost as far beneath the dignity of science (which in spite of occasional lapses into the sin of levity I endeavour as a rule piously to uphold) as the old and fallacious reason 'because there's a B in both.' But cactuses, like camels, take in their water-supply whenever they can get it, and never waste any of it on the way by needless evaporation. As they form the perfect central type of desert vegetation, and are also familiar plants to everyone, they may be taken as a good illustrative example of the effect that desert conditions inevitably produce upon vegetable evolution.

Quaint, shapeless, succulent, jointed, the cactuses look at first sight as if they were all leaves, and had no stem or trunk worth men-

tioning. Of course, therefore, the exact opposite is really the case; for, as a late lamented poet has assured us in mournful numbers, things (generally speaking) are not what they seem. The true truth about the cactuses runs just the other way; they are all stem and no leaves; what look like leaves being really joints of the trunk or branches, and the foliage being all dwarfed and stunted into the prickly hairs that dot and encumber the surface. All plants of very arid soils—for example, our common English stone-crops—tend to be thick, jointed and succulent; the distinction between stem and leaves tends to disappear; and the whole weed, accustomed at times to long drought, acquires the habit of drinking in water greedily at its rootlets after every rain, and storing it away for future use in its thick, sponge-like, and water-tight tissues. To prevent undue evaporation, the surface also is covered with a thick, shiny skin—a sort of vegetable macintosh, which effectually checks all unnecessary transpiration. Of this desert type, then, the cactus is the furthest possible term. It has no flat leaves with expanded blades, to wither and die in the scorching desert air; but in their stead the thick and jointed stems do the same work—absorb carbon from the carbonic acid of the air, and store up water in the driest of seasons. Then, to repel the attacks of herbivores, who would gladly get at the juicy morsel if they could, the foliage has been turned into sharp defensive spines and prickles. The cactus is tenacious of life to a wonderful degree; and for reproduction it trusts not merely to its brilliant flowers, fertilised for the most part by desert moths or butterflies, and to its juicy fruit, of which the common prickly pear is a familiar instance, but it has the special property of springing afresh from any stray bit or fragment of the stem that happens to fall upon the dry ground anywhere.

True cactuses (in the native state) are confined to America; but the unhappy naturalist who ventures to say so in mixed society is sure to get sat upon (without due cause) by numberless people who have seen 'the cactus' wild all the world over. For one thing, the prickly pear and a few other common American species, have been naturalised and run wild throughout North Africa, the Mediterranean shores, and a great part of India, Arabia, and Persia. But what is more interesting and more confusing still, other desert plants which are *not* cactuses, living in South Africa, Sind, Rajputana, and elsewhere unspecified, have been driven by the nature of their circumstances and the dryness of the soil to adopt

precisely the same tactics, and therefore unconsciously to mimic or imitate the cactus in the minutest details of their personal appearance. Most of these fallacious pseudo-cactuses are really spurges or euphorbias by family. They resemble the true Mexican type in externals only; that is to say, their stems are thick, jointed, and leaf-like, and they grow with clumsy and awkward angularity; but in the flower, fruit, seed, and in short in all structural peculiarities whatsoever, they differ utterly from the genuine cactus, and closely resemble all their spurge relations. Adaptive likenesses of this sort, due to mere stress of local conditions, have no more weight as indications of real relationship than the wings of the bat or the flippers of the seal, which don't make the one into a skylark, or the other into a mackerel.

In Sahara, on the other hand, the prevailing type of vegetation (wherever there is any) belongs to the kind playfully described by Sir Lambert Playfair as 'salsolaceous,' that is to say, in plainer English, it consists of plants like the glass-wort and the kali-weed, which are commonly burnt to make soda. These fleshy weeds resemble the cactuses in being succulent and thick-skinned, but they differ from them in their curious ability to live upon very salt and soda-laden water. All through the great African desert region, in fact, most of the water is more or less brackish; 'bitter lakes' are common, and gypsum often covers the ground over immense areas. These districts occupy the beds of vast ancient lakes, now almost dry, of which the existing *chotts*, or very salt pools, are the last shrunken and evanescent relics.

And this point about the water brings me at last to a cardinal fact in the constitution of deserts which is almost always utterly misconceived in Europe. Most people at home picture the desert to themselves as wholly dead, flat, and sandy. To talk about the fauna and flora of Sahara sounds in their ears like self-contradictory nonsense. But, as a matter of fact, that uniform and lifeless desert of the popular fancy exists only in those sister arts that George II.—good, practical man—so heartily despised, 'boetry and bainting.' The desert of real life, though less impressive, is far more varied. It has its ups and downs, its hills and valleys. It has its sandy plains and its rocky ridges. It has its lakes and ponds, and even its rivers. It has its plants and animals, its oases and palm-groves. In short, like everything else on earth, it's a good deal more complex than people imagine.

One may take Sahara as a very good example of the actual

desert of physical geography, in contradistinction to the level and lifeless desert that stretches like the sea over illimitable spaces in verse or canvas. And here, I fear, I am going to dispel another common and cherished illusion. It is my fate to be an iconoclast, and perhaps long practice has made me rather like the trade than otherwise. A popular belief exists all over Europe that the late M. Roudaire—that De Lesseps who never quite ‘came off’—proposed to cut a canal from the Mediterranean into the heart of Africa, which was intended, in the stereotyped phrase of journalism, to ‘flood Sahara,’ and convert the desert into an inland sea. He might almost as well have talked of cutting a canal from Brighton to the Devil’s Dyke and ‘submerging England,’ as the devil wished to do in the old legend. As a matter of fact, good, practical M. Roudaire, sound engineer that he was, never even dreamt of anything so chimerical. What he did really propose was something far milder and simpler in its way, but as his scheme has given rise to the absurd notion that Sahara as a whole lies below sea-level, it may be worth while briefly to explain what it was he really thought of doing.

Some sixty miles south of Biskra, the most fashionable resort in the Algerian Sahara, there is a deep depression two hundred and fifty miles long, partly occupied by three salt lakes of the kind so common over the whole dried-up Saharan area. These three lakes, shrunk remnants of much larger sheets, lie below the level of the Mediterranean, but they are separated from it, and from one another, by upland ranges which rise considerably above the sea line. What M. Roudaire proposed to do was to cut canals through these three barriers, and flood the basins of the salt lakes. The result would have been, not as is commonly said to submerge Sahara, nor even to form anything worth seriously describing as ‘an inland sea,’ but to substitute three larger salt lakes for the existing three smaller ones. The area so flooded, however, would bear to the whole area of Sahara something like the same proportion that Windsor Park bears to the entire surface of England. This is the true truth about that stupendous undertaking which is to create a new Mediterranean in the midst of the Dark Continent, and to modify the climate of Northern Europe to something like the condition of the glacial epoch. A new Dead Sea would be much nearer the mark, and the only way Northern Europe would feel the change, if it felt it at all, would be in a slight fall in the price of dates in the wholesale market.

No, Sahara as a whole is *not* below sea-level; it is *not* the dry bed of a recent ocean; and it is *not* as flat as the proverbial pancake all over. Part of it, indeed, is very mountainous, and all of it is more or less varied in level. The Upper Sahara consists of a rocky plateau, rising at times into considerable peaks; the Lower, to which it descends by a steep slope, is 'a vast depression of clay and sand,' but still for the most part standing high above sea-level. No portion of the Upper Sahara is less than 1,300 feet high—a good deal higher than Dartmoor or Derbyshire. Most of the Lower reaches from two to three hundred feet—quite as elevated as Essex or Leicester. The few spots below sea-level consist of the beds of ancient lakes, now much shrunk by evaporation, owing to the present rainless condition of the country; the soil around these is deep in gypsum, and the water itself is considerably saltier than the sea. That, however, is always the case with freshwater lakes in their last dotage, as American geologists have amply proved in the case of the Great Salt Lake of Utah. Moving sand undoubtedly covers a large space in both divisions of the desert, but according to Sir Lambert Playfair, our best modern authority on the subject, it occupies not more than one third part of the entire Algerian Sahara. Elsewhere rock, clay, and muddy lake are the prevailing features, interspersed with not infrequent date-groves and villages, the product of artesian wells, or excavated spaces, or river oases. Even Sahara, in short, to give it its due, is not by any means so black as it's painted.

FRENCH JANET.

CHAPTER XIX.

MAISIE CHALLENGES PEARLIN JEAN.

THE key-note of Maisie's prayers and struggles after her self-confidence had been rudely shattered, and she had given up—in the religious language of the day—all trust in earthen vessels, was that the remedy lay with God, just as the evil had come from God's hand, in the sense that it was permitted by Him. She did not think of crying 'Avaunt, Satan!' either once, twice, or thrice, as the Rev. Andrew Brydon, shackled by precedents, had done; she looked beyond Satan and cried directly to God. Satan might be the accuser of her and Allan Windygates as he was of the rest of their brethren and sisters—their mighty, implacable enemy; but he was not so mighty as God; he was, after all, God's creature in the sense of being under the Almighty's sovereignty. He was only allowed to do his work till the bottomless pit was opened for the old serpent, and he and all who owned his sway were consigned to chains and darkness. If it were God's will that in the meantime the Devil should work his will, in so far as that the spirit of a slain woman should haunt Windygates and torment Allan Windygates out of his senses—out of the comely body, which would soon be a mere wreck of young manhood's strength and beauty—then, just because He who could not err had ordained what was so strange and terrible to young Windygates and his friends, he and all who loved him must 'bow before the awful will' and seek to bear it meekly and reverently.

But there was no word in the Bible of not crying to God night and day for mercy; not a syllable to the effect that He might not at any blessed moment relent—in man's language, and have compassion, grant the petitioner's prayer, curb Satan's power, and set the prisoner free. Maisie's proudly cherished personal influence, her woman's clever plans, had been brought to nought after a brief success, but they had been self-willed, selfish plans, laid in the light of the wisdom of this world. Maisie knew better

now; yet, in the very fact of her painfully acquired knowledge and humiliating sense of weakness, might she not live to do all things through the Lord Christ helping her? She would attempt nothing again in her own strength; she would willingly forego all honour, praise, and profit—nay, she would consent to offer herself up as the life-long sacrifice in the room of another, all to redeem young Windygates. Her idea was that if she could but conjure Pearlin Jean to show herself to her, Maisie, and hear the girl speak, that she might plead Allan's cause, and promise all lawful atonement on her part so that he might be ransomed. Maisie was already so deeply impressed and infected by the phenomena around her that her blood ran cold at the conception of such an encounter. Still, if God would be with her, she did not doubt that she could face and surmount the ordeal; if God were on her side it did not matter though all the dead, small and great, with Maisie still among the quick, and all the demons in hell—with her, but a single weak woman—were ranged against her.

Why, there were men and women among her country people who, as Maisie had many a time heard, did not shrink from facing alone the dead and the Devil on Hallowe'en, simply to gratify their craving for a glance into futurity. Could not Maisie do as much to rid Allan Windygates of his spiritual foes?

Maisie not only knew her Bible, she knew her Shakespeare better than most modern young women know it, seeing that she had no monthly instalment of novels from Mudie's to distract her attention and fritter away her intellectual sympathies; but when she was possessed with the purpose of calling up Pearlin Jean, and imploring her to consent in God's name to be bought off and appeased, Maisie's inspiration was hardly drawn from Shakespeare. She had no notion of getting the ghost to tell her tale, reveal the name of the person who had done her grievous injury, and so account for her unquiet habits, as Hamlet hailed his father's shade and extorted from him the recital of the hideous crime which had robbed the Majesty of Denmark of his crown and life, and placed the fratricide—the corrupter of the dead man's wife—on his throne. Maisie was assured she had heard all there was to hear of Pearlin Jean's relations with young Windygates and her violent death. Her cry was solely if God would help her—if He would lend her His aid to interpose between young Windygates and his fate. It was thus that 'Fair Janet' had delivered 'Tam Lane' when she stood forward in her unswerving faith and dragged him back from

his doom—the very night on which, according to the laws of the malicious elfin race, he should have paid the tribute that once in a hundred years consigned a frivolous fairy to the horrors of the infernal regions. Maisie knew her native ballads, including that of Fair Janet and Tam Lane, which was a wonderful allegory. If such a woman as Janet, with no support save that of her woman's love, could dare what she dared and come triumphantly out of the grisly contest, ought not Maisie, by the spirit of the Lord, to meet and master one poor fantastic mocking ghost of a slain, erring woman?

Instinctively, in her honest reverence, as well as in her maidenly pride and delicacy, Maisie felt that if the deed were done at all it must be undertaken in secret and none should know of it. Alone she must make her preparations, and alone she must perish if she had been guilty of terrible presumption; but she trusted her Creator and Preserver would save her because she had cried to Him, not only to let her do this thing—and she believed that He had let her—but to hold her up; and she trusted that He did hold her. Was not it marvellous that underneath her—foolish, sinful Maisie—for she had been very arrogant and boastful in her young spirit and strength, with her innumerable shortcomings—might be the Everlasting Arms? For her old Auntie Peggy's sake, for Windygates's and Lady Windygates's sake, because they loved Maisie, though they had not kept her from this strait—above all, because of young Windygates, that more guilt, for which he had no mind, might not be laid at the unhappy lad's door—Maisie prayed and wrestled in spirit that she might come out of the combat alive and in her right reason. Still more she entreated the dear Lord with strong cryings and tears that her purpose might be served. Rather than that the enterprise should fail in its motive, she would say with Queen Esther, in the height of resignation instead of the depth of despair, 'If I perish, I perish; only let Allan Wedderburn go.'

Maisie's scheme was to wait in her room until all the household should be in bed and asleep, and then to sally forth by the door into the gallery, into which her room, like so many of the rooms, opened, and to tarry on the haunted ground till she could find for herself whether Pearlin Jean would come at her call and hold tryst with her. If Maisie waited till the family had retired for the night, she need be under no apprehension of encountering any sleepless member, for the gallery had become the last place

in the house, or out of it, to which he or she would resort in the circumstances; the exception to the rule was young Windygates—the last person Maisie would care to meet on this occasion. But she was aware that Lady Windygates, in horror at the discovery that his bed was often not slept in, and dreading that he might, in addition to his other disorders, become a confirmed sleep-walker, had lately taken a precaution against it. She would softly turn the key in his lock as she passed—the last person astir in the house—on her way to her own room. As she was also the first person about in the morning, she would unlock the door betimes, and if poor, bewildered Allan had tried it in the meantime he would have forgotten the obstacle to his egress hours before. Even if by any extraordinary chance Maisie was detected in her watch, she could profess—might the deceit be pardoned her!—that she had come out of her room to look at the moon, which was at its full, while the weather was fine. There would not be the gloomy night which had fallen on the world when Fair Janet contrived to single out Tam Lane riding next the queen in the gaudy fairy procession, to spring to him, drag him from his horse, grip him, and hold him fast throughout his monstrous transformations. The white moon, though it was a trifle ghostly in itself, showed the face of an old friend and was some comfort, but a far greater comfort consisted in Maisie's recognition of the fact that the longest day was not very far off, and in that northern region the grey dawn, with the cock-crowing, which dismissed all midnight ghosts to their churchyard lairs, would come early. Maisie's watch would not be longer than the flesh and blood which God had built up could endure.

The gallery was very still, with all the shadows stronger because of the bars of white moonlight coming in through the small square windows and serving to extinguish the yellow light of the tallow candle in the silver candlestick Maisie carried in her cold little hand. She was in the dress which she had worn in the family circle that evening; it happened to be a white gown, so that Maisie might have found herself mistaken by a nervous spectator for another ghost in its winding-sheet. Besides, it was a chilly dress for the place and the hour. But Maisie's natural good sense, which saw no reason why she should expose herself to taking her death of cold though she had elected to spend part of the night in the Windygates's gallery, had caused her to wrap round her a dark cloth mantle. Certainly, she had not paused

to consider whether it might not resemble a black pall added to the white winding-sheet.

There was some old furniture in the gallery, a settee here and a chest there, which Maisie passed as she went on tiptoe, wavering slightly, and holding her breath, up the centre of the wide passage, unable to keep from envying with all her heart the sleepers behind the closed doors. The next moment she reminded herself what an encouragement it was to know that human beings were near her, though they were not aware of her vicinity—friends who would rush to her aid in spite of the gallery's bad name, and of Pearlin Jean's disgraced picture at the further end, if she could but utter a cry or make a sign which would reach them to tell them that she was in dire extremity and urgent need of their services. Then again she pulled herself together and reproached herself sternly—was not this to fall back on the arm of flesh, which had proved to be no better than a broken reed, which she had vowed to renounce thenceforth? What had she to do, relying on the nearness of fellow-creatures? Poor, benighted fellow-creatures, no wiser or stronger than she was! If she had God and the right on her side, were not they far better? were they not more than enough to sustain her in the battle she had to fight?

Slowly Maisie advanced up the gallery, holding her candle rather high, like a point of red light, whether it passed into the white flood of the moonlight or into the contrasting gloom which the moonlight only barred. Nothing opposed her; nobody intercepted her. The candle guttered, streamed to one side in the draught, flickered now and then, and the bars of light and shade bewildered her a little; still she saw her way, while she heard nothing except her own quickened breath.

She had gone some distance; she was approaching the boundary partition, which broke in upon the original intention of the builder and prevented the gallery from wholly surrounding the house. She was drawing near the picture, with its face to the wall. She came upon it at last sooner than she expected, with a suddenness that startled her; but she knew what she had to do. She put down her candlestick on the floor at a safe distance, and first she knelt down and cried again to God that He might be her shield, that He might put weapons into her hand for her warfare, that He might make her the conqueror.

It seemed as if her prayer was unheard and unanswered, so faint and feeble did she feel as she rose to her feet and took one

step forward to turn round the face of the picture. Could she do it alone, in the middle of the night, in the shifting lights, which were as strange as everything else about her, without shrieking out or falling down in a faint, and bringing the whole house about her—with young Windygates not saved, with his last state worse than his first, with him, in his man's temper, sorely aggrieved and affronted by her unauthorised meddling in his affairs?

The dark hair, flung back in its long curls on her shoulders, was damp with the sweat-drops wrung out by her agony of terror and doubt. She clenched her hands and set her teeth as she quailed and faltered. She was only able to say again, under her breath, 'Oh, our Father in Heaven, do not forsake me; keep me from giving way now, when it is for Allan, my Allan; and it is the last I can do for him.'

A thrill seemed to run through her as she spoke—a thrill of new life, that yet was not her life. In the strength of that renewal of her being she stooped down and turned the face of the picture. She lifted up her light, and held it where she could see the painted likeness of Madame St. Barbe—'French Janet,' or 'Pearlin Jean.'

There it was in the dainty foreign dress, with Allan's token at the throat, and the pearlins everywhere. The bold, crafty, black eyes looked out from beneath the dark brows and turned-up hat, and met Maisie's gaze defiantly; the corners of the full red lips curved a little, as if they were scoffing at her. The semblance of the stately woman in her rich dark beauty looked more full of life than did the shrinking girlish figure in virgin white—since Maisie had let her mantle fall from her shoulders, standing in front of the picture.

For it was but a picture after all; Maisie could not doubt it, and it felt like a mockery to address it. Nevertheless, she could not tell what spiritual presence might not be behind the senseless canvas, or in the midnight air. Maisie opened her dry lips to speak. 'Madam,' she managed at last to say huskily. The half-whisper rose to a shout in her ears, and with the sound of her own voice there seemed to come a stir and movement into the silent, still gallery—a breath of awakening life, which came from Maisie and yet was not all Maisie's. Her breath was in her throat, which pulsed violently, but she would not go back, she had prayed so piteously not to go back. 'Oh, madam!' repeated Maisie, addressing the reverberating echoes of the unoccupied

space, 'will you not let young Windygates alone? He is very grateful for what you did when he was ill, he would have died to prevent your death if the opportunity had been granted to him. Why are you so wroth with him? Why should you make his life a burden, which he would fain lay down?'

No answer; not a breath, save Maisie's panting breath, disturbed the stagnant air; not even a window rattled or a mouse scuttled away behind the wainscot. The silence was more awful than any sound.

'If it is me,' began Maisie in her old-fashioned speech, and speaking more firmly this time; 'if you do not choose that I should marry Allan Wedderburn, let me know by some word or sign, and if you will let him be—oh! surely, he has suffered enough—I will give him up, we'll part from this hour. We're parted as it is,' confessed Maisie in the crystal clearness of her truthfulness, 'but better that we should sever, with no thought of ever coming together again, than that his young life should be a wreck. Oh! woman, will you not have pity?' cried Maisie, clasping her hands in the earnestness of her appeal to her who was no longer a woman.

The solitary voice, vibrating in its anguish of pleading, drew forth no response. The silence, which was growing to be full of hushed voices, remained unbroken.

'You are either not there,' protested Maisie desperately, her high spirit rising in spite of all the buffets which had been administered to it, 'or you do not heed me. But I am here to await your pleasure if you will condescend to communicate with me this night. You are a bodiless spirit, with powers doubtless, that I cannot compass, to come and go and work what you have a mind to, at your will, and I am but a weak woman, hampered with flesh and blood and all the ills that they are heir to; but I have prayed—prayed to God, who is over all, and by His grace I think to prevail.'

She put down her candle again, gathered up her mantle, and walked to a little distance where there was a window-seat; she sat down with such a stream of moonlight pouring in upon her as to silver her dark mantle and white gown from head to foot. Her hands, pressed together, were raised a little to heaven while she prepared to watch and pray. She was getting so far accustomed to the situation, though she still drew her breath with sighing sobs and her heart fluttered like a newly caught bird under its captor's hands.

Was the watch, to which she had braced herself with so many shudders and pangs, to be useless like everything else? Were her prayers to be 'bootless benes'¹ falling back on her own head? Was Pearlin Jean's refusal to appear in any shape, and answer Maisie, a proof that the persecutress was relentless? Did God mean Maisie to see that it was His will that her Allan, who was still more His than hers, should be the most miserable of all men in this life, in order that he might not forfeit life eternal? Or was his earthly wretchedness to fulfil some unknown purpose in the great mysterious economy of the universe which neither he nor she, who loved him so well, would ever comprehend in this mortal state, perhaps not even throughout succeeding ages? Their duty was to take God's doings on trust, and it was a duty sore for tender quivering flesh and blood to perform, though she could own it was grand and sublime. Would the cock crow presently, and her fruitless watch be over? Or would even the cock betray her? Would he, like the cock in the foolish old song—which was so far removed from this dreadful night—misled by 'a blink of the mune,' crow long or ever it was day-dawn?

The wind, which was never long asleep at Windygates, rose suddenly and soughed through the gallery until the canvas of the picture on which Maisie's eyes were fixed shook a little, as if Pearlin Jean were indeed about to step from the frame.

Maisie started up and caught up her light. 'Is it you, madam, at last? I'm ready,' she said breathlessly.

Once more all was still as death, and a second time the young woman's high spirit asserted itself. 'Do you disdain to notice me?' she cried indignantly. 'Do you deny my right to be here? But I would have you know, madam, that I have a right—the best right. You may say that young Windygates must answer to you before he marry me; but, even though it were so—which I decline to admit—that does not prevent him from being my plighted husband, and, however you may regard such a claim in France, I can tell you it would never be disowned here.'

Then a great reaction came over Maisie—a rush of recollection, right reason, honest faith, not without pride and shame. 'Oh, what am I doing?' she cried to herself, and not to another; 'have I lost my wits that I should be standing in the middle of the night in Windygates gallery, speaking to a soulless picture, worse than the "pented brod" that John Knox refused to bow down to?

¹ 'What is good for a bootless bene?'

And, if Pearlin Jean were here beside her picture, what would she be more or less than a woman, or the shadow of a woman? How could such a one hurt a hair of the head of another of God's creatures, doing her best, with their Maker watching over them both?

In a second, Maisie's heart grew light as a feather—so light that she could have laughed aloud in her sense of the absurdity of the situation. With the perception of the ludicrousness there was also a great underlying peace, that felt like blessed balm to her spirit after the rack on which it had been stretched. And with the lofty scorn and the consoling peace there was also a sudden collapse of bodily strength—a sense of being as weak as water, with all her bones giving way, so that her knees knocked against each other, and it was with the utmost difficulty that she put down the light and tottered back to the window seat from which she had risen. 'I will rest a little here,' she told herself, 'till my strength return, and then I'll steal back to my room and my bed from—what was it?—a fool's errand, or an inspiration from on high, to teach a foolish woman wisdom.' The words were hardly out of Maisie's mouth when she was fast asleep, lying back on the window seat, sheltered from the chill of the night air by the folds of the cloak among which she had nestled down—sleeping as a child in its fearless innocence might sleep, with the moonlight streaming down upon her in a manner that would have been reckoned highly dangerous to the brain of the sleeper in the judgment of old medical authorities; but neither had the moon any noxious influence over Maisie—

The moon by night thee shall not smite
Nor yet the sun by day.

CHAPTER XX.

VICTORY.

MAISIE slept on in her strange resting-place, and it was thus that Lady Windygates found her, after the moon had long set, and the rosy flush of the sunrise had given place to the rays of the sun himself, filling the gallery with cheery broad daylight. Maisie was awakened by Lady Windygates's outcry.

'Oh! my dear, my dear, what is this?' she was saying in—

coherently, unable to refrain from wringing her hands in the height of her distress. 'What are you doing, sleeping full-dressed here at this hour of the morning? What has come to you, Maisie, my darling—you that have been so kind and brave? How shall I ever face your Auntie Peggy if any harm has befallen you?'

'But no harm has befallen me—cannot you see that for yourself, my dear Lady Windygates?' answered Maisie. The voice was full of glad reassurance, as Lady Windygates had not heard it for some time, though on Maisie's face there was still something of the pale reflection of the moonlight—a kind of white unearthliness of peace and steadfastness. 'May I not take a turn in the moonlight in the gallery that is to be Allan's and mine after Windygates and you are done with it, which I hope may not be for many a year?' said Maisie lightly, unaware of any peculiarity in her aspect. 'I grant it was very silly of me to sit down and suffer myself to be overcome by sleep. I am very sorry I startled you, madam, and if it had been anybody else it might have been worse still, since few have such stout nerves as yours. But see, I had at least the discretion to put on this mantle before I quitted my chamber, so that I have not felt any chill, and ere drowsiness overpowered me I took care to set down the light in a place of safety.'

'Oh! are you sure that is all, Maisie?' cried Lady Windygates with her voice gradually losing its lamentable tones. 'If it was no worse than that—though it was very rash and heedless of you, my dear cousin, and you must go to your bed this minute, and swallow a hot posset, and have a warm bottle put to your feet—then nothing need be said of what has happened—nobody need know that you were here.'

'No, no, Lady Windygates,' said Maisie with decision, starting up, and looking round her at the candle, which had burnt itself out, standing on the floor not far from the picture, and at the picture itself, with Pearlin Jean's beauty revealed in the full light of day. 'You are not going to smother my honour, and hush up my adventure—it was quite an adventure, worthy to be told to the whole house and neighbourhood—that I, Maisie Hunter of the Haughs, fell asleep in the gallery at Windygates, and spent the night there without the least ill befalling me, as you yourself can testify.'

'And was it indeed so, Maisie?' demanded Lady Windygates, with a light of comprehension coming into her anxious eyes. 'Did you do it that you might proclaim the result to all whom it

might concern? I'm proud of you, Maisie, proud of your wit and courage, that shame mine.'

'No, not quite that,' owned Maisie, a little shamefacedly. 'I was no wiser than my neighbours, though I hope I've learnt a little wisdom by my experience last night.'

'Any way, it was gallant and faithful of you, though you had been a lad and not a lass. I do not think I could have done it myself, even if the thought had occurred to me. But you should not have run so terrible a risk—your fine colour has not all come back yet, though your lips are not so white as when I found you, and you looked for all the world as if you had seen a spirit,' said Lady Windygates doubtfully.

'And what although I had?' asked Maisie, not with feverish recklessness, but with cool bravery. 'I am a spirit myself, though I am still cumbered with a body. After all, though I am not so sure that it is an encumbrance so long as we dwell on earth, I don't doubt that we'll be better without it when we go to other regions. But while we're here, in this world, for which men and women were made, I think we argue without our host when we count it a disadvantage to be in the body—on the rare occasions when the quick and the dead meet, we've more call to pity the poor spirit, unclothed, unfledged as yet, hovering on the brink of two worlds.'

'Never mind the spirit,' said Lady Windygates hastily. 'Are you certain that you've had nothing to trouble you, that there is nothing on your mind which you're keeping back?'

'Nothing,' declared Maisie with a happy laugh, which seemed to dismiss all the spirits that had ever walked the earth to the vasty deep—their fit habitation—and in itself sounded answer enough to Lady Windygates's question. 'What should trouble me unless that I cannot bear to have that fine picture—you see I've turned it round—stay with its face to the wall? You remember that I advised you before to hang it up in your parlour. I ask you now to do it as a favour to me: put it above the chimney-piece, beneath the inscription you've had carved there, "Fear God and keep His commandments."'

'But that is the place of honour,' remonstrated Lady Windygates, 'where the future master and mistress of the house should hang, if they be not in the dining-room, where Windygates hangs. I never was taken myself. I had not the patience to sit, and my mind does not go with such vanities. But I thought you and young Windygates might be done together by one of the great

London painters when you went up to be presented at Court—eh! when will that be?’ She broke off with a sigh, and resumed again immediately, ‘The place you mention would be where he and you ought to hang.’

‘So we will ere very long,’ said Maisie with the utmost confidence. ‘Thank you for the idea.’ The next instant she returned to the charge. ‘But there is room for a third picture,’ she said composedly.

‘What! beside man and wife? What are you thinking of, Maisie Hunter?’ Lady Windygates could not keep from objecting still more strongly—indeed, resentfully—while she drew up her little figure crowned with its voluminous morning cap. ‘That would be very singular and far from wise-like.’

‘Not though Pearlin Jean nursed him back to you and me?’ urged Maisie. ‘Knowing what we do of the shiftlessness of men folk in general, and of poor Braehead in particular, do you suppose young Windygates would ever have come back if it had not been for the kindness of that lady there,’ pointing to the picture, ‘who ran the risk of being smitten herself to bring him through his ailment?’

‘But we know little or nothing about her,’ complained Lady Windygates, who had met her match, as Braehead had long ago anticipated. ‘And I’m bound to tell you, Maisie, that what we do know, by hearsay, from Braehead, is not to her credit.’

‘That is nothing,’ said Maisie, with a slight wave of her hand; ‘if she ever did wrong, she will do it no more. Young Windygates got nothing save good from her; and, though she perished by misadventure, still it cannot be denied that she was slain by his and Braehead’s means.’

‘What for did she seek to speak with him at the last moment?’ demanded Lady Windygates almost fiercely, and then she used the very plain language in which ladies of even higher rank than hers did not hesitate to indulge in her day. ‘She was a bold limmer, a brazen-faced jade, that would not be denied or kept back, yet you would hang up her likeness at your side or on Allan’s left hand, as if she were his first or second wife? I’m amazed at you.’

‘Are we not all of one great human race?’ maintained Maisie. ‘Is there not a place which we each of us hope to reach, where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage? Does not death wipe out offences, though it can never clear off favours—such a

favour as her tending him in his sickness ; or sweep away injuries—such an injury as when his horses trampled her under their feet, and his wheels passed over her fair body ? Does he owe her no amends ? Would he not be fain, fain to make it ? and do you do me the injustice of imagining that I could ever grudge it to her ? Am I like a woman that, believing in her husband, and having his heart, would still be jealous of his giving a thought, a regret, to any other woman, good or bad, living or dead ? Oh ! madam, I am not so mean or so small as that comes to.'

'You are a noble woman, Maisie, I always knew you were,' said Lady Windygates, wiping her eyes ; 'and so I coveted you in marriage for young Windygates. I would willingly do you a pleasure ; I cannot refuse you what you ask. I do not feel myself at liberty to deny any lawful petition of yours, though it were to cost me my dowager's settlement. But I do not know how I shall thole to look at that picture, day by day, in my parlour. It may be a fine picture and a fine lady, but, oh woman, it is an evil countenance.'

'Do you think so, Lady Windygates ?' asked Maisie wistfully. 'Now I think the brow would have been open, were it not for the way the hair is piled up, and the eyes, though they are a thought bold, are frank and free. I could fancy them running over both with laughter and with tears when they got the chance. The mouth with the curling lips might have quivered with bliss if it had ever kissed a new-born babe, or drooped in unutterable woe as the woman knelt by a little coffin. It is not half a bad face, that of poor, bonnie, reckless Pearlin Jean.'

'That is your opinion, Maisie.' Lady Windygates still spoke rather stiffly.

Maisie went on undauntedly with her version of Pearlin Jean. 'Think what it must be to her if she ever cared for young Windygates—not as we care, may-be not as any honest woman would care—but in some wild way that we cannot understand ; to roam here for years, for generations, and yet never to get a hair's breadth nearer to the place or the people. She might blast Allan's life, if she were permitted (she will not be permitted), yet she must be sensible that nothing she can do, though she were to labour till he were grey-headed, will ever bring a smile to his lip or a flash of joy to his eye. He will never welcome her coming or bid her going God speed, never clasp her in his arms and kiss her again and again. She will see another clasped and kissed,

while she will make his very flesh creep, and he will shrink away from her so long as body and spirit hold together—and she knows it. Lady Windygates, her punishment, if it be but a punishment and not a remedy as well, is dreadful. She must have had a stout heart in life and death, or she would have cried out long ere now that it was more than she could bear. And, if the first murderer Cain was heard in the body, why not poor Pearlin Jean in the spirit? I've a notion that picture will be long looked at and longer remembered—she has earned fame by paying an awful price for a doubtful gain.'

'Maisie, what am I thinking of to keep you so long out of your bed, of which you must have so much need?' Lady Windygates began to bustle about and reproach herself, in order to change the subject.

'I know not, madam,' said Maisie lightly again. 'But I'm not going to bed in broad daylight, on a fine day; see what a fine day it is going to be,' she pointed out as they passed the last gallery window and looked upon the east, all amber. 'Is not that a good sign of what is coming to us? Did I not tell you that I slept as soundly last night as ever I did in my life? And, in place of being sick and sorry to-day, I'm whole and hearty and ready to give God thanks.'

'I do praise Him with all my heart,' said Lady Windygates fervently.

'I'll go to my room for a while,' continued Maisie, 'to change my dress among other things. After that it will be time for family worship and breakfast. Then I've a word to say to young Windygates.'

Lady Windygates took care that Maisie should have a clear course for the word she had to say to Allan Wedderburn by contriving that before he could leave the dining-room, where the family breakfasted, and wander away as usual, the pair should be left alone together for half an hour. Already during breakfast, before the astonished Windygates and the gaping servant, as well as the dazed and confounded Allan, Maisie had given a bright account of her last night's vigil—how she had gone into the gallery in the moonlight, been overtaken by sleep, and spent a gaberlunzie's night there; for

He wouldna sleep in barn,
Nor would he sleep in byre,
But in ahint the ha' door,
Or in afore the fire.

Further, she and Lady Windygates—when she had found Maisie in the morning—had agreed that the fine picture of Madame St. Barbe (whom the servants nicknamed ‘French Janet’ or ‘Pearlin Jean’) ought not to be wasted by standing any longer with its face turned to the wall at the farther end of the gallery. If young Windygates consented, for it was his valuable property, they had come to the conclusion that the heads of the house of Windygates ought to show their appreciation of what was evidently, even to those who were not connoisseurs or virtuosos, a work of art—and, still more, to prove their esteem for a lady who had been their son’s good friend, and their sorrow for her tragic end—by having the picture hung over the chimney-piece in Lady Windygates’s parlour, which would be graced by such an addition to its furniture.

After that speech young Windygates was not disposed to retreat into any fastness he could find; he showed himself more inclined to stay where he was, and seek an explanation of the extraordinary proposal.

‘What is all this, Maisie? What on earth have you been doing?’ he asked, the moment they were alone. He spoke authoritatively and yet petulantly—with the petulance of a man broken down by sickness and sorrow, who had forgotten at the same time that he had relinquished the right to inquire into the doings of the woman beside him. ‘What does all this talk about spending the night in the gallery, of all places, and about hanging that—that picture mean? I insist on being told.’

‘And I am here to tell you, sir,’ answered Maisie with spirit, though agitated in her turn, for she felt that the crisis of their lives had come. ‘It means that I had a mind to probe a certain matter to the bottom; and, having done it, I arrived at the conclusion that all honour should be paid to your friend Madame St. Barbe, who rendered you a great service and unhappily suffered for your sake. Do you not agree with me? Are you not pleased that it should be so?’ she asked with gentle entreaty.

‘Pleased! Yes, oh yes, of course,’ he said hesitatingly. ‘It might have been done sooner, I suppose, if I had required it; the picture need not have been left as it has been. But I am so slow and stupid—you have always found me that, Maisie. Madame St. Barbe is entitled to all the consideration which anybody belonging to me can pay her. I will never hear a word against her. But what I want to hear,’ he continued, getting always

more excited and eager, 'is if she showed consideration for you. If, when you were mad enough to go into the gallery alone during the night, she—she——' Speech failed him, while he passed his hand tremulously over her hair, round her neck, and finally caught her hand in a nervous grip, as if to assure himself that she had sustained no injury.

'Why should I not go into the gallery either by day or night?' Maisie asked quietly. 'It is not hers, or yours, or, for that matter, mine. It belongs to your respected father and mother, who I am sure would make me welcome to walk there at any hour—above all, when I was perfectly safe. Shall I tell you what really befell me last night?'

'Yes, yes, Maisie, for mercy's sake,' he gasped.

'Be calm then, my poor laddie,' she said, as if she had been his mother, putting her hand on his arm and stroking it softly. 'I went there—presumptuously, it might be, though I sought to do it in God's strength—to try and encounter the spirit that was beguiling you, and God was good to me, though I saw no spirit. I found the gallery the very gate of heaven, I tell you, Allan. I slept there in peace, as the patriarch Jacob slept at Mahanaim; more than that, angels, or the spirit of all grace, visited me also, and there came to me a message for you my love, my bridegroom.'

His worn face, which had been a little convulsed, had grown calm under her soothing voice and inspiriting words. He wiped away the slight froth which had risen to his lips, and asked wistfully, 'What message?'

'It was this, Allan Windygates, that you are a man and would not fear the face of a man; then wherefore should you quail before a woman, or the shadow of a woman, whom you never wilfully wronged, whom you would have saved if you could, for whom, and for all the ill you ever did her—by weakness or folly, if you will, and by sheer accident—you have shed tears of blood? It is enough. It is far more than any heartless or wicked man would ever have given her, and if she seek more, resist her as you would resist the Devil, and she will flee from you. Be a man, sir; be up and doing what you're called to do in your day. Look neither to the right hand nor to the left. Go on your way; work your day's darg, and leave God to take care of the rest.'

'If I could but believe you, Maisie; if I could do as you say,' groaned the poor fellow, clinging to her.

'You must believe me and act on the belief. I am going back to the Haughs this very day, and you are coming with me to set the day of our marriage, for it is high time we had kept our promise that was given five months since, with all our friends consenting and nothing to hinder its fulfilment. Are you not feared lest folk should say that I have not had an ardent lover?'

'What does it signify what folk say?' cried young Windygates, half testily, half recklessly, 'when they do not know—I do not believe you know yourself, Maisie Hunter—how well I have loved you; and just because of that love, for the reason that you are dearer to me than my own soul, I'll never make you my wife. I'll never consent that you should be sacrificed for me.'

'Oh, man!' cried Maisie, as desperate as he, 'will you never understand that a woman counts nothing—nothing on earth—a sacrifice which she can do for the man she loves? The only sacrifice she can see is for her to lose him, cruel the emptiness of the world to her without him. If it were not so, do you think I would bid you to the Haughs to-day?' protested Maisie between laughing and crying. 'Do you think I would speak of setting the day until you went down on your knees and prigged with me to name it? And I would, may-be, not have done it then, till I had kept you in a quandary for a month at least. Do you fancy it costs me nothing to behave differently from other women and to relinquish my due at a season when all women get theirs for once in their lives?' she declared, covering her face with her hands to hide her burning blushes, and with glittering drops forcing their way between her slender fingers.

'Then, Maisie, you'll not bid me to the Haughs in vain,' said young Windygates, lifting up his head with the hectic red in his cheek restoring to it some show of colour and life. 'That is the least I can say. If you set the day, I'll be an honoured man and I'll stand to it. What is more, I'll swear that you'll never repent it so far as it rests with me; and for anything more God keep us and Windygates.'

'God will keep us and all that trust in Him, Allan, from every foe, small or great, from every power of earth or air. Did you pay heed to the Psalm we sang at worship this morning—

Behold, He that keeps Israel,
He slumbers not nor sleeps.'

When Braehead was told that young Windygates had gone

over to the Haughs with Maisie Hunter to arrange about their marriage, which was to be carried out at once as had been originally intended, without any renewed objection on the part of Windygates or Auntie Peggy, who were brought to see that things had proceeded too far, and that it was too late to try to stop them; and when the philosopher was further informed of what had led to this happy turn of events—he exclaimed triumphantly:

‘The very thing! Somebody to spend the night in the Windygates gallery and come out in the morning not a hair the worse. That rascally picture not to be thrust out of sight and made a mystery of, but rather to be rendered a conspicuous object, with which everybody might grow familiar—capital! I marvel the whole course did not recommend itself to you sooner, madam,’ addressing Lady Windygates.

‘I marvel too, Braehead; and to you as well as to me, in all its bearings,’ she said dryly. ‘You might have faced your *lusus naturæ* yourself. It would have been easy for you, no doubt, but you must mind it was harder for us ignorant, superstitious women folk. Yet the thing was left to be done by a bit lassie who reads her Bible and says her prayers, and lo’es Allan Wedderburn better than her life. She did not shrink from facing ghost and devil to deliver him. Can you tell me this, Robbie Wedderburn, you who are so wise; is it true what some cavillers say, that the men and women who believe neither in God nor the Devil, but are given to hankering after auld wives’ tales and pernicious lees of signs and warnings, spaen of fortunes and the like, are the most frightened for spirits and the most subject to them, of all living creatures?’

‘I cannot speak for others, Lady Windygates,’ said Braehead cautiously. ‘I can only say for myself that I believe in nothing except what I see and hear, or have proof positive that men like me have seen and heard.’

THE EPILOGUE.

YOUNG Windygates and Maisie Hunter were married, in good truth, with all the speed that was not unbecoming the social rank and importance of the pair, nothing preventing the marriage. It was certain that even before it, from the date of the noised-abroad, much-canvassed incidents of Maisie Hunter's having passed a night in the gallery at Windygates, and of Pearlin Jean's picture having been hung publicly in Lady Windygates's parlour, the stories of the French woman 'walking' at Windygates grew fewer and farther between, until they were almost limited to the experience of those who as evil-doers were, according to Lady Windygates, evil-dreaders. Their consciences made cowards of them, and peopled the most innocent scenes with spectres for their special benefit.

But it could never be clearly known whether or not young Windygates was entirely freed from the visitation which had nearly been his destruction. His lips had always been sealed on the subject, except on the single occasion when he had appealed to Braehead for information and aid. His lips continued to be sealed even to Maisie. All that could be said was that he bore the infliction, if it continued to exist, no longer like a sensitive, passionate lad, but like a brave man. He went about his duties as a country gentleman diligently and perseveringly. He came to the front whenever his fellows called on him. He became noted, even more than his worthy father had been, for a reasonable spirit and a tender heart, though in both the houses of Windygates and the Haughs he followed the excellent precedent of the douce lairds of the Deerwater in minding their farming and planting, hunting and shooting, electioneering and serving as yeomen, while they retired into the background in their homes, that the ladies might vindicate their superior powers as family lawgivers and household managers. He was for the most part a grave and sometimes a slightly absent-minded man, never recovering the lightness of heart and freedom from care which he had carried with him to Paris. But there was no reason to think he was not happy; he appeared well content and at peace with the whole universe. He was a something higher and better than a gallant young soldier starting gaily on his first campaign—he was a tried warrior, bearing the scars of battle

always about with him, though he has been victor in the crucial fight.

Neither was Maisie the high-headed, high-handed madam which she was once in some danger of developing into, in spite of her native kindness. She, too, had been in the wars, and had brought back honourable tokens that she had played her part well and grown in womanliness. She never forgot that she had been utterly foiled in her first essay in her own strength to win young Windygates from the enemy. She never ceased to believe that it was not by human wisdom or might, but by the spirit of the Lord, that she eventually conquered. The belief humbled and softened her. She was greatly devoted to her husband, and much occupied with him in the precarious health, which never entirely recovered the bad fever and the shock which his constitution underwent in his youth. She ruled her many children, her dependents, her neighbours, in a measure, for she was a woman of marked individuality, with a force of character which had a tendency to impress itself on those around her; but she suffered them to have a will and a way of their own apart from her will and way. She had learnt a larger wisdom, a wiser, gentler tolerance, than belonged originally to her character. She was much beloved and depended upon by the husband and children who had succeeded old Auntie Peggy in her intimate regard, and by many who were her contemporaries, and had profited by her genuine friendliness. Her memory was handed down full of fragrance to other generations, and nobody, either of her own or of a succeeding day, thought of asking if Maisie Windygates was happy?

There were some subsequent curious outbreaks of the *culte* or fear of French Janet or Pearlin Jean—one especially, which deserves to be recorded. Young Windygates, who was by that time Windygates proper, since his honest old father was gathered to his fathers, had gone with his lady to London, to pay their long deferred visit to the seat of the Court. They left the Dowager Lady Windygates to keep the two houses of Windygates and the Haughs, and control the band of children, as she was well able to do. The couple tarried some time in the south of the kingdom, which was then very distinct in its customs from the north. They wished to see all that was to be seen, to acquire whatever new ideas and fresh practices struck them in the light of being worth acquiring, and to get the value of the money they had spent,

and the fatigue they had incurred, in the long journey, when they had posted to the borders of the Tweed and across it, across the Tyne and the Tees, through Durham and York, and the midland counties, on to London.

The pair were presented to their Majesties by Lord and Lady Lathones, and their pictures taken by Romney. These were sent down—along with many other packages—by sea, to the care of old Lady Windygates, who was then presiding over her son's house. Using her discretion, and gratifying an old prejudice, she removed the picture of Pearlin Jean from its place above the chimneypiece in the parlour to an inferior position on a side wall, and hung in its room, side by side, in the dual solitude and state of honoured matrimony, Allan and Maisie Wedderburn.

Within twelve hours Pearlin Jean was at her old tricks, and had been seen in different parts of the house, though not by the depredator. Indeed, Pearlin Jean's assiduities again waxed rampant, and she presented herself to the very children. To be sure, the little innocents were not a bit frightened, nor even very much astonished, by the appearance of the bonnie lady, who had stepped down from her picture-frame on the wall. But the scandalous liberty was not to be borne. Their grandmother wrote in all haste to her daughter-in-law, asking what was to be done, and counselling her not to mention the affair to her husband, lest the story should discompose him—men were so easily put about—and spoil his grand holiday in London.

Young Lady Windygates answered by the next post:—

'Dear Grannie,—You know I told you long ago, just before I was married, that if my husband and me were ever 'limned'—as they call it here—our pictures and that of Pearlin Jean might hang together without prejudice. You must have forgotten our conversation—of which I remember every word, for it was in the gallery at home, just after you had come in and awakened me from the sound sleep I fell into on the wonderful night I spent there. It was a wonderful night, though I saw no ghost, and never expect to see one till I'm a ghost myself, which I hope, please God, for Windygates's and the bairns' sakes, and for your sake, my old friend, since, though you are so hale and hearty for your years, still I flatter myself you would miss me—may not be for a while yet; but life and death are as God wills. I call yon a wonderful night, for it was on it that everything was made clear to me, and after going nearly out of my wits with

fright I slept at last in the eeriness and chill and white moonlight as sweetly as our little Allan sleeps in his cradle in the cosiest corner of his nursery. Now, dear Grannie, you'll do what I ask to make up for your mistake: you'll just put back Pearlin Jean where I said she should be—and it may be the poor lady, invisible to you and me, heard the words. She is to hang on the left side of Windygates, while I hang on his right, and let who will cry out at the group. Then you will find, I trust, that neither the bairns nor anybody else, who was not a principal in the sad business—and of him, though he is my very marrow, I cannot speak—or whose conscience is not clear, will be further troubled with Pearlin Jean.'

And Maisie was right for that season.

THE END.

